

## Chapter 1: The Second Twin

Harry Potter was lonely. It had always been a fact of life for him, really. His twin brother Eric, the Boy-Who-Lived, got all the attention from their parents, and he was regarded as a second – the other boy.

Harry was sure that Lily and James, his parents, didn't really mean to leave him out. But they never looked at him the same as they did to Eric; with Eric each glance was so full of love, pride, but also a deep anxiety over what he would have to do one day – defeat Voldemort. Harry understood that he would never be as special as his famous brother, and it hurt. He had long gotten used to the idea over his eleven years of life, however.

“Daaaad! Can I go over to Ron's to play some Quidditch with him and his brothers?” Eric burst into the house, eyes alight with excitement. “I can use the new quaffle we just bought yesterday, can I go, please, please?”

James smiled at his son from his armchair in the living room. “Go ahead, kid, have fun.”

“Oh don't forget, Eric, thank Molly while you're there for the lovely carrot cake recipe she gave me last week,” Lily chimed in from the kitchen.

“Okay Mum,” Eric replied, already halfway out the door.

Lily and James had gotten permission a few years ago to buy a personal portkey that would take them to just near the Burrow since Eric would go there so often. The specialized portkeys were incredibly expensive and had a load of charms on them to assure the destination couldn't be changed or it couldn't be used by anyone but the family – people with Potter blood. Despite the cost, the two had agreed that it would be easier than going to the Weasleys' all the time with Eric.

Harry watched the interaction between his brother and parents detachedly and turned back to his book, Charlie Chorton's Choice Charms, and began to study one on the list. The levitating charm, it

read, had the incantation 'wingardium leviosa' and a helpful diagram of the wand movement. Harry practiced the movement with a finger, adding the flick at the end with a flourish. He smiled to himself and moved on to the next one.

Harry had always liked reading about charms and other spells, even if he didn't have a wand yet and wasn't allowed to actually do them. Both Eric's and Harry's accidental magic had begun at a very early age and had continued for an unusually long time – indications that they were both going to be powerful wizards.

Though so far their magic seemed to be similar, the two didn't look like typical twins. They were fraternal, not identical, so they had marked differences in their features. Eric had dark brown hair that was tinged with deep red, and his father's sparkling hazel eyes. Harry, on the other hand, had raven black hair and stunning emerald eyes, even more green than his mother's. Harry's skin was pale, his face's features aristocratic like his grandfather Potter's, his stature average. Eric's skin was fair as well, though not quite as pale, but his facial features were soft, modeled mostly after Lily's, and he was slightly taller than Harry.

Harry supposed it was easy to see they were brothers, but hard to tell they were twins. Sometimes Harry wished that he looked more like Eric so maybe one day his parents would mistake him for his brother, and notice him for once. And maybe actually treat him like he was something special, rather than an afterthought.

Yet Harry knew that Eric was the Boy-Who-Lived, and that he could never be what his brother was. It wasn't so much that he wanted to be famous, but he wanted to be liked and maybe someone wouldn't just rush past him one day to the famous boy next to him, but they'd come to him, and smile at him like he was worth something.

Harry didn't bother to mull over it too much, though. He only felt worse when he did.

"Oh, looks like Hedwig's come back from Hogwarts," Lily spoke from the kitchen, appearing at the door with a dish and rag in hand. She preferred to do some things the muggle way – she always insisted

that using tons of kitchen charms didn't make a house a home like doing things the old fashioned way did.

"Did Dumbledore answer your question, dear?" asked James, still sitting in his armchair going over the new Quidditch roster for the Applebee Arrows.

"I'll take a look," replied Lily, setting down the things in her hands. Hedwig hooted happily and stuck out a leg with not just the expected one, but three letters attached.

"James!" Lily squealed suddenly, grinning. "Hedwig brought Eric's Hogwarts letter! Quickly, James, firecall the Weasleys and tell him the news."

Harry liked watching his mother smile. She rarely smiled at him, but it was such a nice expression on her face that sometimes he could pretend that maybe his being good caused her to smile, when she seemed to be grinning for no reason. He was well aware that it was an unlikely fantasy, that she'd look like that because of him, but he hoped sometimes anyway... he didn't know why.

While James was in the midst of the firecall to the Burrow, Harry took the moment to grab his own letter from Hedwig's leg. The owl gave a low hoot and nipped his finger lovingly, her great amber eyes staring up at him. Hedwig, despite being Eric's owl, had liked Harry more right from the beginning, and he had always returned the affection when he could. At least he knew he had a friend, even if she was an owl.

"Oh Merlin, I'm so excited for him!" Lily burst out, running to hug James, her red hair spinning around as she embraced him. "This is when it all really starts, though... from now on there's no going back, is there..."

Lily trailed off uncertainly, letting go of her husband. Her emotions had quickly shifted from enthusiastic to anxious. "What if the other children are jealous of him? What if they don't like him? What if th—"

“Lily,” James interrupted, “He’ll be fine. We’ve raised him so he can handle everything that comes at him – he’s friendly, noble, smart, and a pure Gryffindor. Nothing can go wrong, okay?”

She visibly relaxed. “Okay.”

“Muuuuuum!!” a voice suddenly boomed from the front door. Eric rushed in, breathing hard. “I portkeyed right back as soon as I heard, where is it, Mum? Where’s my letter?”

“Right here, sweetie,” Lily grinned, handing the envelope to him. Eric ripped his open without a moment of hesitation, and his eyes grew wide with anticipation.

“Brilliant!! Can we go get our supplies tomorrow Mum? Please?” Eric asked eagerly after he had scanned the contents for a moment.

“Of course,” responded Lily, a twinkle in her eye, not unlike the one often seen in Dumbledore’s.

“How about we pick you up some more Quidditch supplies while we’re there? Even if first-years can’t get on the team, it never hurts to be prepared,” added James, coming to stand beside his son and peer in at the letter as well.

“Does Hedwig’s cage need cleaning, Mum?” Harry asked softly from his seat.

“Yes, could you do that please, Harry?” Lily responded distractedly.

“Sure, Mum.”

Harry didn’t like being around Eric when not just one, but both of their parents were standing there, giving him that proud smile that Harry never received. It was too much for him to take, and he had to get out of there.

Hedwig had hopped onto his shoulder, affectionately rubbing up against his cheek. Harry smiled slowly and then began proceeded to scrub the owl droppings and feathers out of Hedwig’s large and

spacious cage. The Potters could have only the best for Eric's owl, obviously.

He had brought his Hogwarts letter with him, which now that he was alone, he opened reverently. The beautiful green ink lettering spelled out his invitation to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and a booklist was included, signed Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress, and Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster.

Harry let out a low whistle. He was going to Hogwarts, finally, and even more important, he was going to finally be able to use the magic that he'd always felt curling and churning just under the surface, ready to be released and channeled... with a wand of his very own.

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"Come on, Eric, Ollivander's first," James pointed. "Best wandcrafter in Britain, and probably all of Europe too."

Eric hurried after his father, while Harry lagged behind a bit. Lily had gone to purchase their cauldrons and potions supplies while the boys bought their wands.

Ollivander's shop had a rather musty smell to it, Harry noticed as he stepped inside. It smelled faintly of wet wood to him, which wouldn't be surprising since all the wands were being made from various trees. The place was small and cramped, the shelves overflowing with an array of long, thin boxes. There didn't seem to be any method of order in where the wands were placed, but somehow Harry suspected that Ollivander didn't need any indication – he just knew.

"Ah, the Potter boys. I knew you two would be here soon," Ollivander winked, his pale blue eyes peering at them searchingly. "Who first?"

"Me, of course," Eric replied quickly, stepping up to the quirky old man with silver hair.

Ollivander's eyes locked onto the lighting-bolt shaped scar on Eric's forehead with interest. "Yes, Mr. Potter, I'll find a wand for you..."

The man turned and ruffled through a stack of boxes, causing more than a couple to fall to the floor. "Wand arm, Mr. Potter? This is thirteen inches, dragon heartstring, oak."

"My right."

Eric gave the wand a swish, but nothing happened.

"How about this one? Eleven and a half inches, phoenix feather, maple. Quite supple." Ollivander suggested after some more rummaging.

Swish. Nothing.

"Hm... ah. I think I know the one. Twelve inches, unicorn hair, cherry."

Eric waved the wand and brilliant red sparks appeared out of the end. "Yes, this is the one," Eric laughed. He looked ecstatic. "It just... feels right."

"As I've always said," Ollivander nodded, "the wand chooses the wizard. Now, for the second Potter, eh?"

Harry raised his eyes to the man and stepped forward. He would be getting a wand. A wand!

Ollivander disappeared behind a large pile of boxes and came striding over with a few. "Wand arm?"

Harry held up his left arm pointedly, and took the first wand from Ollivander, who was busy saying, "Thirteen and a half inches, phoenix feather, pine."

He gave the wand a wave, but nothing happened.

"Twelve and a quarter inches, dragon heartstring, cedar, very rigid."

Harry swished the next wand, but it was quickly snatched out and replaced by another when it was obvious nothing was happening.

“Eleven inches, unicorn hair, holly.”

Again he waved the wand, but to no avail.

“Twelve inches, phoenix feather, oak.”

Nothing.

“Thirteen and a quarter inches, dragon heartstring, maple, rather swishy.”

The wands continued to pass through Harry’s hand and then quickly out; Ollivander became increasingly more excited with each wand that didn’t work, it seemed. Harry eyed him warily, and tried the next wand – eleven and three quarters inches, unicorn hair, redwood.

“Don’t you worry, Mr. Potter, we’ll find the right one. Tricky customer... tricky indeed...” Ollivander muttered, seemingly more to himself than to the eleven year old boy beside him. After a few more minutes and a couple dozen wands, Ollivander stopped. Harry by now was getting slightly nervous; what if there wasn’t one for him; would he ever be able to go to Hogwarts if he didn’t get a wand?

James and Eric were waiting behind him, looking impatient and frowning. Harry glanced back at his father and mouthed “sorry” but James just nodded politely and kept waiting, that restless look in his eyes. Eric began to fidget, looking out the window and across the street at an older boy carrying a broom. Harry turned his attention back to the wandcrafter.

“It seems I’ll have to bring out some of my more obscure wands, with different cores. I haven’t had to take these out in years...” mumbled the old man wildly, a crooked grin forming on his lips. After a moment Ollivander emerged from the very back of his storeroom with a variety of boxes, many of which were caked with dust.

“Right here is thirteen inches, hippogriff feather, pine, give it a wave now,” Ollivander urged.

Harry tried it, but like the rest before, nothing happened.

“This one is eleven and a half inches, pixie dust, cherry.”

Nothing again. Ollivander then eyed Harry with a very strange expression and handed him another wand, this time remaining silent.

Harry grabbed it from him and even before he had given it a wave, a feeling of extreme... wholeness enveloped him. Beautiful dark blue fireflies emerged from the wand tip along with a series of purple sparks. Harry smiled, feeling like he was being hugged by a mother, or reunited with a lost and very missed friend.

“This is... wonderful. What is it made of, Mr. Ollivander?” Harry asked softly.

Ollivander’s expression shifted to one of reluctance. Even Eric’s attention was drawn by the strangeness of the old man’s actions, while James stood behind, now intrigued.

“That, Mr. Potter, is twelve inches, dementor’s essence, walnut.”

Harry’s insides felt like they were collapsing. He heard a muffled gasp from Eric behind him. Harry looked at his wand, this beautiful wand that made him feel accepted like no other person ever had. So beautiful, but it had a core of dementor’s essence?

“Now see here, Ollivander, don’t go scaring my son like that...” James began, his voice shaky though, like he didn’t believe his own words.

“It is true,” stated Ollivander, his eyes hard.

“Er... sir, what really... what even IS dementor’s essence?” asked Harry, his green eyes wide and slightly frightened.

“Dementor’s essence is the piece of itself that a dementor leaves behind on the body of the person whose soul was just taken by it. The person it kissed,” Ollivander explained slowly. “The essence is



basically the dementor's breath left behind on the victim's lips. Very, very hard to obtain, and thus very, very expensive, Mr. Potter."

"What's wrong with you?" Eric suddenly burst out, facing Harry. "What kind of person are you, anyway, if your wand is dementor's essence, of all things!" His hazel eyes were wild and accusing.

"I'm sorry," Harry found himself saying weakly. "I don't know, I'm sorry..."

"Get Harry a new wand, Mr. Ollivander," demanded James.

"The wand chooses the wizard, Mr. Potter. It is not young Harry's fault that this particular wand was drawn to him, but after testing all of the others, it is undeniably the only one that will work for him. The core of a person's wand does not reflect everything about the wizard who wields it, remember, for even the worst sorts of wizards have wands with pure, good cores," Ollivander explained rationally, despite still edging away from Harry himself. "Though... it will be quite expensive."

"How much?" James asked flatly, his expression flinty.

"Twenty-seven galleons," Ollivander admitted.

"Twenty-seven?!" repeated James in disbelief. "Why the hell—"

"As I explained before, it is extremely difficult to obtain th—"

"That's almost four times what Eric's wand cost! I'd understand if Eric had an expensive wand, he's the Boy-Who-Lived after all, but Harry? Harry's nothing special!" James protested, voice loud.

Harry coughed and began to blink rapidly, looking away. Wasn't it enough to know that you were rotten, that you were bound to a magical item formed from a dementor? It was too much to have your father say you weren't special so bluntly, so uncaringly....

James seemed to have realized what he had said as well, and looked in Harry's direction but avoided meeting his eye. Eric watched the scene, gaping silently. "I didn't mean that like that, Harry."

"I know, Dad," Harry replied lowly, but both of them knew that James had spoken his mind exactly the way it had come out. A moment passed, the only noise Eric's shifting his weight to the other foot.

"Your total is thirty-four galleons, Mr. Potter," said Ollivander quietly, his pale blue eyes wise and sad.

James counted out the correct amount and handed the coins to the wandcrafter in silence.

"Good day, Mr. Potter," Ollivander bowed his head as they walked out. Harry glanced back at the old man, who locked eyes with him for a moment and nodded solemnly.

The two boys and their father walked in silence for a moment, the tension obvious, until James suddenly spun around to face the twins. "Don't tell your mother of this, or speak of it to anyone, do you both understand me?"

"Yes, sir," they replied in unison, hands out in front of them like the Potters had always required, so that it was apparent that no fingers were crossed.

The three of them met up with Lily momentarily, who was carrying a small bag that contained their cauldrons, shrunk of course. "What's wrong?" she asked immediately, sensing the tension and taking in the unusual expressions on their faces.

"Nothing's wrong dear, Eric got his wand just fine, see?" responded James in a convincingly upbeat voice. Eric brightened and showed his wand to his mother eagerly, grinning as she admired it and praised him.

"Okay, what next, Eric? Where would you like to go? We have to get you... let's see..." Lily consulted her son's Hogwarts letter. "Three black work robes, a pointed hat, a pair of dragon hide gloves, a winter

cloak. So those are from Madam Malkin's. Or we could get your telescope and brass scales; I already bought the cauldrons and phials. And... lastly, the books, from Flourish and Blotts. Which shall it be, sweetie?"

"Mummm, don't call me that in public," Eric huffed. "I say we get our robes next."

The four of them headed over to Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions, where they met Madam Malkin inside, a squatty, jolly witch with purple robes. Another attendant milling about hurried over to the group.

"Hogwarts, you two?" Madam Malkin asked. "We'll fix you right up with some robes right away, though don't worry if they're a little on the big side right now; boys grow like weeds in their first few years, of course..."

The attendant measured Harry quickly and pinned the long black robes to the right length for his legs, arms, and shoulders. Eric was getting treated by Madam Malkin herself, and was done just a moment after his brother.

"Finished already, dears. Those should last you through some growing, so have a good year!" the witch said with a wink, and then turned to James and Lily to negotiate the money.

While the adults were talking, Eric turned abruptly to Harry. "I don't understand you."

Harry's eyes flickered to Eric's and then lowered again, fixed on his trainers.

"Dementor's essence, Harry. I've never even heard of anyone with that core... I never even knew dementor's essences existed! I mean to get an answer to what I said before – what's wrong with you? You're strange enough even without the wand core, you're always so quiet and you never get along with perfectly friendly people, like Ron or Ginny!" Eric's voice was a fierce whisper. "Why couldn't you be with me like Fred is to George, they're best friends as well as

brothers – they're twins too! But I never even know you because you don't bloody try."

"I'm not your identical twin for a reason, Eric, we're fraternal," Harry responded coolly. Eric's words had hurt him. "And I'm just as freaked out as you are about my wand. D'you think I like the fact that a dementor had to kiss someone, it had to suck out their soul, so my wand core could be gotten?"

Eric opened his mouth to retort, but right at that moment Lily came striding over to her sons. "Where next, Eric?" she asked sweetly.

"Umm... how about Flourish and Blotts?" replied Eric, looking pointedly away from Harry and down the street at the bookstore. When Lily looked away Eric glanced sourly back at Harry, then turned to follow his mother. Harry sighed, feeling his eyes prickle a little bit with tears, and then blinked them back. Crying had never done him any good before, so there was no reason to start now, he resolved.

In no time they were arriving at the bookstore, standing before shelves stacked to the ceiling with books of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Eric immediately made his way to the Quidditch section, James right behind him, while Lily started gathering the boys' school textbooks. Harry wandered to the charms section – he had always liked charms – and began to flip through some titles. As he made his way along the wall, the section soon switched into Defense Against the Dark Arts. He noticed Curses and Counter-curses (Bewitch Your Friends and Befuddle Your Enemies with the Latest Revenges: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs, Tongue-Tying, and Much, Much More) by Professor Vindictus Viridian, Hexes, Jinxes, and Curses: Defense through Offense by Hubert Acidium, The Lethifold, Werewolf, and Vampire Compendium, by Robert Howler.

One book, in particular, however, caught his eye. Dementors: Beneath the Hood by Mordrid Vane. Quickly checking to see if anyone was watching, Harry pulled the book out of its place and opened to a random page – 167. On it there was a ghoulish illustration of a dementor from a person's memory who had gotten half of his soul sucked out; the dementor had been repelled by a Patronus mid-kiss. The person's brain had been irrevocably damaged,

but there had been enough of his identity left that his memories could be drawn out by a Legilimens.

From the memories came the sketchy illustration of what he had seen of the dementor underneath the cloak. Hazy, gray, rotting flesh, it looked like, and an oval mouth (more like a hole than a true mouth though) that seemed open in the shape of a silent scream. Pitless eyes that seemed to exude darkness were set below a long, scabby forehead that appeared to be bald.

The representation made Harry want to vomit. He quickly flipped to another page, 49, which was explaining how dementors' magic worked to make people relive their worst memories. It was all very scientific according to the author; it was the creatures' method of incapacitating their prey... they were only doing what was natural – hah – as if draining a soul was something normal.

Harry shut the book suddenly and pushed it back into its spot with a shudder. He unconsciously touched his new wand, which seemed to send a wave of warmth up his arm as soon as he did so. Jerking away, he moved on along the shelves, which seemed to be getting into increasingly sketchy subjects.

This time, *Born from Darkness: The Nature of Dark Magic* by Wyvern Noxis caught his eye. Curious, Harry ran a finger down the well-bound spine, turning it over for a small summary only to find there was none. He opened it to flip through pages randomly, seeing stunning illustrations and complicated spells, as well as long paragraphs explaining the mechanics of the magic behind it. His parents had always been so against dark magic that, naturally, Harry wanted to know why. Would it be so wrong for him to read a book like this, if even just to understand why to stay away?

Harry picked up the book and carried it protectively at his side, looking around the corner to see his brother and father still engrossed in a new text which was analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of various obscure Quidditch brooms. Harry then continued along one of the aisles until he saw his mother, who was collecting their potions textbooks at a shelf rather close to the check-out counter.

He waited until she had picked the two out and added them to the ever-increasing stack next to her. She took the stack into her arms again, humming as she went along into the next aisle for Transfiguration books. It was far enough away that Harry could make it to purchase his book without her seeing. He strode up to the clerk and put the book on the counter.

"Hello, how are you doing today, little guy?" the young blond witch said kindly as she turned to his book. Her eyes widened at the title, and then she looked suspiciously at him.

"Oh I'm fine, thank you, how are you?" Harry responded in an upbeat, childlike voice, as if nothing were strange. He then adopted a very young, shy expression. "I like your necklace. It's really pretty."

Derailed from her original suspicion, she smiled brightly. "Oh how sweet of you, my grandmother gave it to me," she responded, touching it lightly.

"The blue matches your eyes," said Harry, making himself blush for the effect. He felt strained magic spark within him, subtly distracting her attention from the book. He looked down at his feet. "A pretty necklace for pretty eyes."

"Oh aren't you a little charmer," the witch giggled, though she looked very pleased. She had tapped the book with her wand without thinking to show her the price automatically while they were talking, so the amount due appeared in gold numbers in the air in front of her.

"That'll be twelve sickles and a knut, little guy," she smiled. He kept his eyes locked on to hers, distracting her from looking at the title again, and set down the money on the counter from his pocket.

"Thank you," said Harry earnestly, a boyish smile forming on his lips.

"Have a lovely day, dear," the witch grinned back at him, waving him goodbye.

Harry smirked as he turned around to go towards the front of the shop. The 'cute little boy' trick wouldn't work for too much longer, as

he was getting older, but he was sure he'd come up with new ways to get around situations like that. He could usually keep people distracted if he looked them in the eye long enough as it was; his eyes' fierce emerald color and his ability to channel a bit of magic had ended up being quite a useful perk for him.

For some reason, though, it never had worked on his parents, for which Harry was extremely sorry.

A few minutes later Lily began to drag her husband and Eric from the Quidditch section and came out with three bags full of books. She gave two to Harry on the way out, as he was standing near the door (his book laying innocently behind him on the ground). He smiled at his mother, but she ignored him to hurry after Eric, who was now begging for an ice cream from Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor.

Harry slipped his book inside one of the bags and followed them.

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Dark magic alters the perception of the caster. Traditional light spells are considered thus because they generally do not infringe upon the free will of others and do not affect the caster's well-being or mental state. The Imperius Curse is perhaps the most classic example of dark magic. Not only does it completely destroy the free will of the victim, it also begins a slow change in the caster's mind that makes him or her more prone to trying to command others and to cast the curse again. Dementors are an example of a dark creature because they alter the victim's mind by barraging it with horrible memories.

Why, you may argue, is a spell like a memory charm not considered dark then? This is where the line between dark and light magic becomes sketchy. Memory charms are most often used legally to alter traumatic memories or the memories of muggles that have seen too much. Though memory charms can be used with evil intention, they can be detected as well as broken by any wizard or witch stronger than the caster. This ambiguity between dark and light, however, is called by some 'gray magic'. Only a small population uses this term, but a memory charm is a perfect example of gray

magic. Henceforth in this book spells will be classified in one of the following ways: light, gray, or dark.

Harry looked up from his reading, considering the book's logical explanations. At age eleven he had quite a vocabulary due to lots of time spent with the books in his father's study, but he still stumbled over a few of the bigger words.

He looked back at the book again. He had always loved to think about these sorts of things; magic was so fascinating in all of its forms. Whenever he would try to ask his mother or father a question about dark magic, they would either pretend not to hear him or snap a quick answer back, often consisting of 'dark magic is evil, you'd do best to stay away from it'. Harry knew his family was supposed to be the epitome of light, not only because Voldemort was to be defeated by Eric, but because of both James and Lily's amazing talent with light magic and oaths never to use dark spells.

Ever since that fateful Halloween night, his parents had been obsessed with making sure that Eric grew up the right way, equipped with everything he needed to be the icon of the light, the symbol of hope, that the wizarding world would need. Harry knew that must have been a rather overwhelming thought – to know that their son's future would not be nearly as innocent or carefree as they had hoped – but he occasionally wished that it wasn't all they cared about. They could spare a thought for their second son from time to time, at least.

Harry stretched out on his bed in his cramped little room. Eric's room, next-door, was easily three times the size of his, if not more, and was furnished much more nicely. Admirers as well as Remus and Sirius would often spoil the boy, sending him the finest comforter and latest toys.

But that was enough of that. He didn't need to think about all the things he wished he had – why bother? That was a lesson he had learned long ago.

Sometimes though, Harry broke and wondered what it could have been like, had Voldemort not arrived on that Halloween night. He and Eric had been side by side in their cribs, while James had been out at



a Halloween party with his friends. Lily had been home, but it was late and she had fallen asleep on her bed after putting the twins down for the night. Harry remembered his mother's story one time when she told Eric just how he had been marked...

"I had been asleep in my room when suddenly I woke up to the noise of the door slamming open, though I didn't know it at the time. I thought James had arrived home and was making a ruckus, so I attempted to fall asleep again. When I heard more jostling and someone coming up the stairs, someone that sounded nothing like James, I began to panic. I bolted up and ran to the door to come protect you, Eric, but just as I reached the doorway Voldemort passed and sealed it shut on his way straight to you. I pounded and cried for help, but could not break his spell, even when I tried to blast the door away.

"He made his way to your room, where you were now crying, and cast the fateful spell. But you defeated him, Eric – he marked you with your scar when you bounced the curse back at him. When finally I had been released, Dumbledore, James, and I hailed you as the one from the prophecy – Voldemort had marked you as his equal, even though you had vanquished him for now.

"I'm still thankful that Voldemort did not kill me, but instead merely sealed me from getting to you two. I suspect only his anticipation about killing you caused him to focus on that, and only that, and it was easier and shorter to block me from getting to you than it was to take the time to fight and then kill me."

"I'm glad you didn't die, Mum," Eric had said, hugging Lily tightly.

"Me too, sweetie," replied Lily, rubbing his back. Harry stood to the side, and watched the two.

Harry was relieved that it wasn't he who would have to defeat Voldemort, but at the same time he thought that Eric was altogether too impulsive and reckless to go about it the right way. If there was a right way, that is. Harry sighed and then started as Lily shouted up the stairs, "Dinner!"

He groaned. Dinner was always an awkward affair for him, as he was rarely spoken to and it was a time for Eric and his parents to 'bond'. Harry would be forced to watch their expressions, silently knowing that he could never be that person that his parents wanted to speak to, to nurture, to love.

Harry wearily rose from his position on his bed and began to make his way to the dinner table. Upon reaching it, he took the seat farthest away from Eric as possible, and began to spoon some meager portions of pasta onto his plate.

"Dumbledore's decided to move the you-know-what to Hogwarts, Lily," said James as he strode into the room. He set his auror's bag down by the side of his chair.

Lily kissed her husband lightly on the cheek as he came in but then frowned. "I suppose it would be safest at Hogwarts... I just don't like the idea of it being in a place full of children. Anyone who came after it would go through them first."

Eric's eyes were wide and calculating. Harry knew he was trying to figure out what the 'you-know-what' was; he'd been trying to every time his parents had mentioned it. Harry hadn't come up with anything, but then again, he hadn't given it much thought. Eric was the one that liked to pry into other people's matters. Harry was quite content with dealing only with things that affected him.

"Ooh, Mum you made treacle tart for dessert?" said Eric excitedly.

"Yes, I thought I should prepare your favorite things for your last night before you go to Hogwarts," Lily replied lovingly, her eyes soft and somewhat sad at the thought of her beloved son being gone.

Eric's eyes lit up. He'd been looking forward to going to school with Ron Weasley and Anthony Goldstein and his other friends for years now – and it was finally going to happen, tomorrow morning.

"Oh Eric..." Lily sniffed, "I love you sweetie, I hope you have a good time..."

“I’ll be fine, Mum,” Eric replied in a long-suffering voice.

“I know. I just worry about you. That’s what mothers do.”

Review and I will love you!

This button right down here. Yep. That's the one.

## Chapter 2: A Place to Belong

Harry stared at the Hogwarts Express with some trepidation, but a sense of excitement as well. Finally he might be able to get away from Eric's shadow; finally he might be able to have some friends. Best of all, he would actually be able to get away from his parents and the pain of their neglect to love him.

The train was beautiful. It had shiny red paint with "Hogwarts Express" written in gold lettering on the side. It creaked slightly whenever students got on or off the boarding areas, but Harry thought that he'd be able to appreciate anything that was his passage to freedom.

"Goodbye Eric! Have a lovely time!" Lily waved, tears forming in her eyes as she watched her son walk away to the train, Hedwig's cage in one hand, trunk rolling behind him in the other.

"Bye Mum. Bye Dad," Harry tried. Their sole attention was fixed on his brown-haired twin. Lily waved absently in his direction, so Harry just shook his head in annoyance and then proceeded to board.

As he made his way down the compartments, he found one that was empty third from the end. Harry sat down and peered out the window at the mass of students, tall and short, pureblood and muggleborn, all saying goodbye to their families and friends. Harry gave a small huff and turned away, wishing he had someone to say goodbye to.

Ten minutes later, the train was just starting to pick up speed when two girls rushed into Harry's compartment. He looked at them with raised eyebrows.

"You're Eric Potter's brother, right?" one asked quickly, her blond hair swishing in her ponytail.

Harry considered saying no, but figured that it wouldn't help matters much later when they figured out that he was indeed.

"Yes."

“Do you know where he is?” the other jumped in as soon as he responded.

“No.”

“Oh,” the girls sighed. “I guess we’ll just look around some more.”

They left with as much warning as they came in, so Harry turned back to the window, which was now just starting to show rolling hills and mountains in the distance.

“D’you mind if I sit in here?” a small girl with strawberry-blond hair asked timidly, having just appeared in the compartment doorway.

Harry looked at her. “Go ahead.”

“Thanks. I’m Katrina Rivers, by the way,” she smiled. She had a faint dusting of freckles across her nose and light blue eyes.

“Harry Potter,” he responded carefully. Katrina just nodded without saying anything or showing any recognition of his last name. “So you’re muggle-born then?”

“Um... that means I have non-magical parents, right?” she asked.

“Yeah. So that’s a yes then,” said Harry dryly.

“Yep. What about you?”

“Well, my father’s a pure-blood and my mother is a muggle-born witch. So I’m a half-blood,” Harry explained.

“Wouldn’t that make you like... three-quarters-blood or something?” figured Katrina, cocking her head to the side in confusion.

“Blood purity really isn’t figured mathematically. Basically if there’s a muggle somewhere in the lineage, that pollutes the line,” said Harry.

“Pollutes?” Katrina repeated, eyes narrowing. Little wrinkles appeared on her nose. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Harry said in a placating voice, "A lot of pure-bloods consider muggle-borns to be lesser... that's just the way that they think of it. You'll see."

"I'm not lesser!" she growled defensively. A strand of hair fell into her face which she immediately tucked behind her ear.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Prove it to them, then." He yawned, bored, and looked out the window.

She stared at him. "Fine. I don't think I like you anyway. You're just as bad as they are, using words like 'pollute' and 'lesser'."

Harry humphed noncommittally and turned back to looking out the window. "Go find somewhere else to sit, then. You're going to hear it a lot worse from other people anyway... believe me, I'm not being harsh compared to what they'll say."

A tense moment passed and then, "Fine! I think I will."

She stood up, turned on her heel and marched from the room, her long strawberry-blond hair waving behind her.

Harry let out a breath through his nose and leaned against the window, wishing he could take his words back. He'd sure done a bang-up job of talking to someone his age – a potential friend, even.... The sun lit up the surrounding hills and fields as large puffy clouds floated overhead. His forehead felt cool against the glass, and he thought he could almost smell the countryside's freshness. His hand unconsciously started to stroke a raised white scar on the side of his right hand, bringing back the memory of how it had gotten there.

He had been four, interested in coloring a picture he had drawn. Eric sat to his right while Lily and James sat near the hearth, Lily sipping at a mug of butterbeer and James at a small bottle of Firewhiskey. They were smiling and laughing as James retold one of Sirius's recent motorcycle escapades. The house was warm with the smell of brownies just out of the oven, one on which Eric had burnt his tongue a few minutes ago, as he had tried to eat it before it cooled.

Harry picked up a green crayon and began to fill in a crudely drawn depiction of a dragon. "Welsh gwreen..." he mumbled again as he colored harder. In one of Eric's books, there had starred a Welsh green dragon whose adventures around the countryside were narrated. Harry had listened, pressing his ear against the wall to hear Lily's voice reading to Eric. It was his favorite of the stories he had barely heard.

"What's that?" Eric asked Harry, turning from his own indecipherable drawing. He pointed at the green blob.

"The Welsh gwreen dragon from the stowry," Harry replied, as if it should be obvious.

Eric's eyebrows furrowed and his mouth suddenly set into a nasty scowl. "That was MY story! You can't draw it!"

"I can too!" insisted Harry.

James and Lily looked up at the commotion. "Harry what are you doing to your brother?" he asked, his voice disapproving already.

"Nothing!" said Harry loudly. He grabbed the crayon and turned back to the paper as furious tears began to fill in his eyes.

"That's not an answer, young man! Look at me, Harry!" James grabbed him roughly by the hand and tugged him out of his chair. He tripped, unbalanced, and trying not to fall reached out to the table where the tray of brownies was set. He brought the entire tray of hot brownies onto the floor with him, the knife that had cut them into squares landing tip stuck diagonally in his hand.

Harry shook his head and closed his eyes, trying to forget the situation. His parents would always blame him... never Eric... but that was a long time ago, he reminded himself. He had a chance to make things different, now. Many people would pass by his compartment but none seemed too interested in sitting with him after Katrina Rivers. Perhaps it was the lost look in his eyes or his uncaring posture, but they would just continue on.

After a minute, Harry got out his book, *Born from Darkness: The Nature of Dark Magic* by Wyvern Noxis, and began reading from where he left off. The writing was thick and used sometimes obscure and uncommon words, along with terms that Harry was sure that only 7th years would know, if even. He did the best he could, and read on.

Finally, dusk enveloped the train, obscuring any faraway view that could be seen out the window. Harry's excitement grew as he strained his eyes to see the approaching lake, reflecting the moonlight with calm ripples.

He watched some of the older students passing by in the train corridor with their characteristic black robes on, and realized with a start that he needed to change into his. He pulled them on quickly and tucked his wand into his pocket beneath his robes, idly thinking about how hard it would be to reach it there, should he need to get it out in a hurry.

The train began slowing to a stop, its wheels squeaking against the rusty tracks. Harry grinned and opened the door to his compartment, joining the crowd of students jostling to get to the front.

"Oy! Neville, I think I just saw your toad!" came the voice of Ron Weasley a few meters ahead of him. A brown haired boy looked up and rushed to him.

"Trevor? Where'd he go?" he said frantically.

"Eww, who has a toad these days," an older Ravenclaw complained to her friend. "Those are disgusting, I can't believe they were ever in fashion."

"I know!" the friend responded in the same tone. Harry rolled his eyes at how gossipy they sounded. It was just a toad, after all....

"All off, c'mon everybody! There's a good boy... careful there, Eloise... how was your summer Cedric?" boomed the voice of the huge man, Hagrid.



Harry knew of Hagrid since both of his parents were friends with the gigantic jolly gamekeeper. As he approached the door, Eric not far in front of him, Hagrid boomed out "Firs' years! Firs' years! Come 'ere with me."

A crowd of some of the shortest students gathered around Hagrid. A few of the young girls and boys looked openly reluctant at being around the abnormally large man and his bushy beard, but many jumped excitedly and talked with him, Eric included.

"Any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now, and follow me!"

The lot of them did as they were told and followed Hagrid as he took them on a dark, steep path. Harry heard a few girls squeal as they accidentally touched some of the thick, wet bushes that gnarled their way along the sides of the trail.

"Yeh'll get ter see Hogwarts soon, jus' round this bend." It was obvious that Hagrid was looking forward to the kids' reactions to the castle, and he wasn't disappointed.

A great intake of breath seemed to pause them as soon as the castle became visible, quickly followed by sighs of wonder and amazement. One of the scrawniest looking girls had wide eyes and her mouth seemingly stuck in an "Ooooooh" position.

Harry smiled, taking in the picturesque scene – the vast castle with its arches and towers jutting into the sky. Before them bobbed many little wooden rowboats docked at the shore of the lake. "Come 'ere now, everyone, and no more'n four ter each boat, yeh hear?"

Harry followed Katrina Rivers into a boat and two more boys climbed in behind them, one of them large and bulky and the other slim, with pointed features and white-blond hair that stood out as the castle's lights reflected up from the water. Katrina glared at Harry whole way as he took an oar, and, along with the bigger kid, he began to row.

The few mumbling voices were soon silenced and the only noises as they crossed the lake were the soft laps of oars sliding in and out of the water. Soon they approached a dark tunnel, and upon emergence

to the other side, they laid eyes on stone steps rising up out of the water. They had apparently arrived under the castle.

They all disembarked from their boats and gathered again around Hagrid, who then did a quick check around the boats to make sure no one had left anything. "All righ', 'ere we go." He knocked on the castle door three times and a moment later, a stern witch clad in elegant green robes opened the door. Her graying hair was pulled back into a tight bun.

"They're all 'ere, Minerva," Hagrid grinned a toothy grin as he gestured to the mob of students behind him.

"Thank you, Hagrid. Come now, everyone, move along." She opened a door to the entrance hall and they all crowded in. When they all had congregated in the hall, the witch cast an appraising glance over them and began to speak.

"Welcome," said the woman regally, "to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

A few notable purebloods smiled widely at one another; others still looked shell-shocked that they were actually there.

"My name is Professor McGonagall, and I am head of Gryffindor house. The other three houses in the school are Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin. Each has its own unique traits by which the students there are sorted, and the students there will both share dormitories with you and be in your classes. At the end of the year house points will be tallied up, and the house with the most points will win the house cup. Points are awarded in classes for good answers or other merits, and points can be taken away just as easily for inappropriate behavior or rule-breaking."

She stopped for a moment, looking at them above her spectacles. The students stared back, and a few fidgeted in nervousness. Harry noticed that Eric had a pert, cocky grin plastered on his face as he held his head high.

Harry watched the boy with white-blond hair that in the light he could now recognize as Draco Malfoy, a notorious pureblood whose father was rumored to be in league with Voldemort before Eric defeated him. The Malfoy boy's gray eyes caught him watching and he cocked a careful eyebrow, giving Harry a sneer before turning back to McGonagall. Everyone knew the Potters were light.

"You will now take place in the Sorting Ceremony, so please quietly follow me in a moment." With one last critical glance over them, she turned, her robes twirling behind her, and opened the door to the Great Hall.

Two amazingly long tables were situated to their right and two to their left as they entered down the middle. At the head of the Hall, the staff table was placed horizontally risen above the rest, so the teachers could see the students better. In the middle sat Albus Dumbledore, and across from him on the floor between the two middle tables was situated a tiny stool, upon which a ragged wizard's hat was sitting.

"Wow!" someone gasped, and Harry followed a girl's pointing finger to the ceiling, which as he soon discovered, didn't really seem like a ceiling at all, but instead the dark night sky.

A bushy-haired girl whispered behind him, "I read in *Hogwarts: A History* that the ceiling is enchanted to mimic the sky above it. Isn't it fascinating?"

"Yes," Harry replied softly, smiling.

Suddenly the hall went silent and a strange voice began to sing. Harry pushed around someone to see who it was, and then noticed that the song was coming from a slit in the hat that sat on the stool.

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,  
But don't judge on what you see.  
I'll eat myself if you can find  
A smarter hat than me.  
You can keep your bowlers black,  
Your top hats sleek and tall.  
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

And I can top them all.  
There's nothing hidden in your head  
The Sorting Hat can't see,  
So try me on and I will tell you  
Where you ought to be.  
You might belong in Gryffindor,  
Where dwell the brave at heart.  
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry  
Set Gryffindors apart;  
You might belong in Hufflepuff,  
Where they are just and loyal,  
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true  
And unafraid of toil;  
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,  
If you've a ready mind,  
Where those of wit and learning,  
Will always find their kind;  
Or perhaps in Slytherin  
You'll make your real friends,  
Those cunning folk use any means  
To achieve their ends.  
So put me on! Don't be afraid!  
And don't get in a flap!  
You're in safe hands (though I have none)  
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

Everyone began to applaud and Professor McGonagall soon stepped out with a long roll of parchment, which she began to unfurl. It was obviously a class list, as she started with "Abbott, Hannah!" after explaining that they were just to try on the hat, and it would decide which house they would be sorted into.

Harry watched as a blond-haired girl tentatively made her way up. He was thankful that his last name wasn't at the beginning of the alphabet so he'd be able to watch the other children. After a moment sitting on the stool, the hat cried out, "HUFFLEPUFF!"

Harry watched the students closely and made a mental list of who went where. He also glanced up to the staff table, where a twitchy,

thin man in a turban sat next to Severus Snape, looking very uncomfortable about the arrangement. Harry knew of Snape from his father's tirades about 'Old Snivellus' but he had never actually seen him until now. His hair was greasy and jet black, hanging around his face in a menacing manner, his dark eyes set below angry brows.

"Perks, Sally-Anne!"

Harry looked back to a tall brunette girl getting sorted into Hufflepuff. Then the next name sounded, which Harry's breath caught for.

"Potter, Eric!"

Immediately whispers broke out. The Eric Potter? Several students craned their necks to get a look at Harry's brother, who was now sitting confidently under the Sorting Hat. After a tense moment, the rip in the hat opened and out came, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry clapped along with the rest of the students and watched Eric run off to the lions' table, his hazel eyes delighted, but glinting as if he had expected it all along. Everyone had, really. Eric had been brought up the son of two Gryffindors and, Harry snorted, definitely had the characteristic rashness at times.

"Potter, Harry!"

As Harry walked up to the hat, heart pounding, he noticed many confused looks follow him. It wasn't exactly common knowledge that Eric had a brother, much less a twin. Rumors of the Potter twins had been circulating on the train and at King's Cross, but many of the older students had yet to hear about Eric's brother. Harry ignored them and took his place on the stool, putting the dusty old hat securely on his head and staring out back towards the tables.

"Ahh, the other Potter sibling, I saw you in your brother's mind. You're quite different from him, aren't you?" an old voice seemed to whisper in Harry's ear, reverberating around his head.

Yes, Harry thought in response.

“Oh dear... much of your differences aren't your fault, I see. Oh Lily and James, I'm quite disappointed in them, yes I am.... But where to put you? Hufflepuff is out of the question; you may work hard, but not for the same reasons that they do. A natural intellectual you are; perhaps Ravenclaw is the place. Gryffindor? No, you have a different sort of courage, not like the impulsive kind they have there...”

Not Gryffindor, Harry thought insistently. He didn't want to be in the place where his brother was creating a shadow for Harry to be shunted off to, yet again.

The hat chuckled. “I wouldn't even dream of it, Harry. Slytherin then? You have plenty of ambition, that's for sure, and power that would be respected there. But I've done it before – should I do it again, knowing what could be in store for you?”

I thought only dark wizards went to Slytherin, thought Harry uncertainly. He had heard it all of his life from his parents.

He could practically feel the hat smirk in his mind. “That's not entirely true, though it is quite common, as the nature of dark magic has a lot to do with ambition. As I've told other nervous first-years here, dark doesn't mean evil. You should know, eh Harry? Keep up with your research. I'll be interested to see how you do in....”

Harry looked up with a jerk, as he realized it had only been a moment since he first put on the hat. Conversations in his thoughts went far more quickly than they did aloud.

“SLYTHERIN!”

A few muffled gasps echoed through the hall, but for the most part everyone was deathly silent. No applause came from the Slytherin table as Harry made his way there, and through the whole time Harry's eyes were locked across the hall with his brother's. Betrayal was written in Eric's gaze, and a sort of shame mixed with disgust.

Harry glared back stonily, his green eyes flat and flinty as limestone. He took a seat next to a thin girl with chestnut-colored hair and light

brown eyes, who seemed to be the least threatening out of his company at the Slytherin table.

McGonagall continued with the list. Harry paid extra attention to all of the people who had gone to Slytherin in his year now. He watched as Blaise Zabini, a tall black boy with high cheekbones and slanted eyes, was made a Slytherin, concluding the class list.

Looking around, Harry saw the other first years – Draco Malfoy, Millicent Bulstrode, Vincent Crabbe, Daphne Greengrass, Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, Tracey Davis, Gregory Goyle, and Sonia Moon. There was no way he would forget any of their names; Harry had an amazingly accurate memory, for which he was thankful for. Still, sometimes he hated the fact that he could remember things that he'd rather have forgotten....

Dumbledore said a short speech at the head table, but Harry was only half-listening. Instead, he took the opportunity to look at the people around him at the table. Perhaps it was all that he had been told about Slytherin house, but they looked like an unpleasant lot. Well, not unpleasant, Harry supposed. Just subdued – there were no wide smiles or raucous laughter from any of these students; they had a more subtle humor that caused a chuckle or snicker at most.

After Dumbledore finished his speech the feast materialized on the table. Harry glanced over the array speculatively and then spooned meager servings of a few things onto his plate; he wasn't used to eating much anyway, with his parents half the time forgetting to call him for a meal, or neglecting to fill his plate anywhere near as full as Eric's.

"Harry Potter," a sneering voice spoke to his left. Harry turned – Draco Malfoy's glacial gray eyes were staring back at him with a kind of interested amusement. "My, this is a surprise, isn't it? A Potter in Slytherin."

Harry stared at Malfoy, eyebrows raised and watchful, as if waiting for him to say something worth his time.

"I'm sure Mummy and Daddy will be ever so pleased, eh Potter?"

Harry's insides froze. He hadn't thought of that, not yet... what were his parents going to say? Every childish wish of being loved by them was thrown on the ground, discarded – he knew how they were. They wouldn't love a Slytherin.

Malfoy noticed the shocked expression on Harry's face and grinned wolfishly. "Struck a nerve, have I?"

The handful of other first years watched Harry and Malfoy in silence, only broken by a quiet guffaw from Gregory Goyle. "Don't talk about my parents and I won't mention yours, Malfoy," said Harry sharply. "Though I'm sure they'll be glad to know that their plans for Malfoy Junior's Death Eater career have gone off on the right foot."

"My father was under the Imperius curse, Potter," Malfoy drawled, lying with practiced ease. "Everyone knows that."

Harry grinned. "Oh, that's right. I'd forgotten that weak minds ran in the Malfoy line; after all, they've all been controlled under dark lords... it should have been obvious to me."

The girl with the chestnut-colored hair to his side gave a small huff of laughter that Harry was quite sure no one else noticed. If he remembered correctly (which he did, of course), she was Tracey Davis.

Two spots of pink appeared on Malfoy's pale cheeks. "I don't have the time to waste talking to a half-blood mudblood-lover that nobody knew existed until he mistakenly got sorted here. You don't stand a chance in Slytherin, Potter, just a... friendly warning."

Malfoy, having regained his composure, winked mockingly at him and then walked back to his seat by Pansy Parkinson. Harry watched him leave and after a moment turned back to his food, suddenly not feeling very hungry at all.

"He was telling the truth about one thing at least," a feminine voice called from across the table. Harry glanced up to see Sonia Moon regarding him with a kind of detached interest. Harry knew of her



family. They were staunch purebloods, the whole lot of them, excepting a tendency in the last two centuries to have an abnormal number of squibs. It was embarrassing for the Moons, to say the least, and had brought their standing down from one of the most respected pureblood families to a somewhat lesser rank.

Exotic yellow-green eyes watched him with an almost predatory glint. Harry met her gaze.

“Oh? And what’s that?” he asked.

“The fact that, essentially, you haven’t really existed until now,” said Sonia. She pushed a lock of waist-length straight black hair out of her eyes. “Yes, on the train we began to hear that the fabled Boy-Who-Lived had a sibling with him, but before that, no one knew that Eric Potter had a brother. And now it appears he has not just a brother, but a twin.”

“I’m hardly to blame for nobody bothering to hear about me.”

“On the contrary. You’re entirely to blame,” Sonia responded matter-of-factly, helping herself to a roll and buttering it delicately.

Harry looked at her expectantly, waiting for further explanation.

“I’m assuming, of course, that having a brother as the Boy-Who-Lived creates a bit of a... shadow, shall we say,” Sonia replied, her eyes glinting dangerously. She was smirking. “And as a new Slytherin, one would think that Harry Potter had some ambition to step out of that, at least a little.”

“So you’re saying since I haven’t done anything more noteworthy than defeating Voldemort, that I have no ambition?”

“Put in those terms, it sounds extreme. But you have the right idea. Eleven years and no one’s mentioned your name or even read about you in books alongside your brother? Wouldn’t you be referred to at least by association with him? A footnote, even? And yet neither I nor any of the other students here were aware of your existence – until you finally did something different than the Boy-Who-Didn’t-Die over

there,” Sonia rolled her eyes, jerking her head toward the Gryffindor table.

“I see,” replied Harry neutrally.

“Just wondering if the Sorting Hat did its job right, that’s all. Draco might be justified in saying that you could have trouble in Slytherin.”

She shrugged and turned back to her meal with an unconcerned, placid expression. Harry wasn’t fooled, though. He made a mental note to watch out for Sonia Moon.

Her words brought up another issue, however. He’d steadfastly avoided reading any book detailing Eric’s defeat of the Dark Lord throughout his childhood as he felt he didn’t need to be reminded of what he already knew.

It was news, however, that his parents and Dumbledore hadn’t thought to include his name when they were questioned by authors and journalists for the story. His life was more forgotten by the adults than he had imagined.

Just then, though, Dumbledore interrupted from the head table to begin start of term announcements. He reiterated that the Forbidden forest was named so for a reason, listed a few of the new banned magical items, addressed the fact that Argus Filch and the teachers would be watching for magic usage in the halls, and curiously stated that a corridor on the third floor was banned.

Finally, with a generous wave of his arms, Dumbledore bade them all goodnight to go to their house common rooms, first years led by prefects, please.

“Slytherin, first years come to me,” a tall boy with golden-blond hair announced. “I’m Lyrian Derrick, one of your fifth year prefects. Please follow me to Slytherin Dungeon.”

The first years clambered excitedly to him, looking suddenly much more like eleven-year-olds and less like an imposing group of vultures, dark and secretive. Vincent Crabbe was grinning, his mop of

dark hair shaking as he laughed at something Millicent Bulstrode had just said. Draco Malfoy and Gregory Goyle were listening as Theodore Nott animatedly described what he had heard the Slytherin common room was like from his older sister Kathryn, who was a 5th year.

Harry trailed the other students and listened to their conversations discreetly, taking in the Hogwarts scenery as they traveled down a staircase, only to see the staircase next to them move. All the first years watched in wonder, while the older students rolled their eyes at the amazed expressions and skipped a trick step, which Gregory Goyle promptly got his ankle stuck through.

“Watch it there, that’s a bad one,” Lyrian pointed out somewhat belatedly. He pulled out his wand and with a quick incantation unstuck Goyle’s foot.

“How are we supposed to remember which step it is?” Daphne Greengrass spoke up. The step was indeed an inconspicuous one in just about the middle of the staircase.

Lyrian motioned at a large portrait of a pixie at about the same place on the wall as the stair was. “Just remember Faye the Fallen’s portrait is about level with it,” he said.

Faye’s bright electric blue wings fluttered excitedly in her frame. “I’ll watch out for them, Lyrian,” she murmured seductively, winking at him.

“Thank you, Faye,” he smiled adoringly at her, and then turned his back to her, facing the students. His expression immediately shifted to one of patient exasperation.

Once they were far enough from her earshot, he explained further, “Takes a lot of work to get a pixie on your side, but I’ve got her on call throughout the castle. You’d do well to remember the use in befriending portraits.”

Harry grinned at how wonderfully manipulative Lyrian must have been to charm the pixie. Usually they had terrible temperaments and

were amazingly rude, refusing help to anyone and generally enjoying causing chaos. That he had 'tamed' one for his uses was quite impressive. Lyrian continued to lead them down even further, until the air felt slightly moist and Harry had the distinct feeling that they were below the lake.

"Surname is Derrick, eh?" Draco suddenly asked the prefect. "I don't recognize it."

"You wouldn't, would you?" Lyrian responded mysteriously. Draco shifted uncertainly but kept his face carefully blank. Only a subtle glint of confusion could be seen in his eyes, if one looked the right way.

Suddenly he stopped and faced a blank stone wall to their left. "Lethifold."

The stones shifted aside and became a grand entrance to a vast and beautiful common room. The ceiling was low, giving an immediate snug feeling to the place, but the furnishings made the place seem fit for a king... or the children of the pureblood elite.

Velvet cushions of a regal emerald green were arranged about silver-gray sofas. Carvings of snakes sometimes lined the edges of furniture and wound about the corners of the marble hearth. Soft green and white lamps and lights were placed expertly around the room in order to keep all areas light, but none over-bright. A few of the older students were already lounging about the room, sitting back in armchairs and talking about whatever it was that Hogwarts students talked about in their first day after summer break.

"Lyrian!" one of the girls exclaimed when she looked up to see him ushering the first-years. She had smooth olive skin and catlike eyes. When the other students around her heard her, they too got up and greeted Lyrian. He was obviously popular in Slytherin.

"So anyway, the boys' dormitory is to the left, girls' to the right. You'll see that your trunks and belongings are already up there. If you have any questions, figure it out yourself. You're Slytherins, and I've ended my yearly bit of coddling, so deal with it." Lyrian then turned back to his peers and with a nonchalant gesture waved the rest of them

through. He and the others immediately looked like they were conspiring about something, but one of them had cast some sort of bubble charm that allowed no one to hear anything they said past a meter or so radius.

Blaise Zabini began to climb the stairs to the first year boys' dormitory and Harry followed suit. He quickly claimed the bed closest to the door – even if he might hear a bit more noise than the others, he never knew when he would need to leave or enter easily. It was best to be safe.

Blaise took the bed next to Harry's, Malfoy to Blaise's other side, and then on down the line with Theodore, Vincent, and finally Gregory. The boys didn't talk much as they prepared for bed. Harry distinctly saw Malfoy glare at him a few times, but other than that there was little interaction between them all. The situation was awkward, and Harry knew there would be many more nights like it.

The next seven years would definitely prove interesting in Slytherin house.

That, at least, was certain.

Review!

### Chapter 3: Brother in Name

Severus Snape extracted three frogs' spleens carefully from a jar in his personal storeroom. Walking back to his potions, he delicately added the first spleen, stirred counterclockwise three times, then the second one, (then clockwise once) and finally the last, after passing exactly thirty-seven seconds with no stirring. He then set the fire beneath the cauldron to simmer, sitting back at his desk for the long wait.

Every year the new class of Slytherins had its surprises; this year, it was not just a surprise.

It was shock.

James Potter's son, a Slytherin? Severus had almost gasped when the hat announced it. He had certainly stared, aghast, but he realized now that no one was likely to have noticed his lack of composure – they were all watching the Potter boy themselves.

Severus's face adopted a sour expression as he considered this new... situation. This morning he had the first year Slytherins and Gryffindors for their very first potions lesson. It was bound to be a catastrophe, with very few students, if any, appreciating the delicate balance of the ingredients reacting with each other, each of them scorning potions as a mere cooking class useful for nothing but a few healing elixirs.

Severus considered how best to show them how very wrong they were.

It would be a joy to torment Eric Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived... yet another Potter who didn't earn his place or his title. Harry Potter put him in a difficult place, however. Of course he would try to make the boy as miserable as James Potter once made Severus, but it would be troublesome to take points off of his own house in the process.

Severus shook his head as if trying to clear it, and blinked again with the absurdity of a Potter being in Slytherin. Well, if he couldn't take points off, he could still make the boy's life difficult, that was certain; it

would be even easier as his Head of House to affect him... there would be no stern Minerva looking down her nose at everything he did.

Severus Snape hid a grin as the dungeon door creaked open. His first year class had arrived.

- - -

Harry followed Daphne Greengrass into the dungeon, a full ten minutes before class would begin. It wouldn't do to be late on his first day, after all; he especially wanted to make a good impression for Professor Snape. He remembered James scorning and talking about the man as a "dark, slimy bastard" but felt he should make his own judgments, as that was obviously a biased opinion.

Indeed, the imposing professor was perhaps just as interested in Harry as Harry was with him. Harry could feel Snape's eyes on him as he got out his notebook and a few supplies. Everyone in the room looked up as Vincent Crabbe, Greg Goyle, and Draco Malfoy strode into the classroom confidently, taking seats near the front.

Finally the Gryffindors entered, and Harry winced as the noise level in the room sharply increased. It seemed as if everyone was joking or laughing or excited about something; an Indian girl and her blond friend were gossiping loudly about an older Hufflepuff student, while Ron and Eric were discussing the players on the Gryffindor Quidditch team last year. The bushy-haired girl that had talked to Harry while they were waiting in line at the sorting ceremony was now smiling at a chubby boy with soft features – Neville Longbottom, Harry recognized. Finally, a black boy and a kid with a thick Irish accent seemed to be on about Muggle football.

"Silence," snapped Professor Snape. The dungeon gradually hushed and then became deathly quiet. Even the rustling of the students' robes seemed strangely amplified, as did the scuffing of trainers on the stone floor. Snape began the class by taking the roll call, pronouncing each name slowly and deliberately. One might think he was bored if it weren't for his sharp and intelligent gaze on each child's face as he went through the list.

“Ah yes,” he said softly, “Eric Potter. Our new – celebrity.”

Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle started to snigger behind their hands. Eric raised his eyebrows, as if daring Snape to comment further, but wisely (in Harry’s opinion) kept his mouth shut.

Once Professor Snape finished calling the names, he took a deep breath and then began to speak in barely more than a whisper. He had an obvious gift of keeping a class silent with minimal effort. “You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making. As there is little foolish-wand waving here, many of you will hardly believe that this is magic. And like many students before you, you will inevitably discover that... as usual... your first impressions are wrong.”

Harry found that an extremely poignant statement, especially in regards to his current situation. He once had thought that all Slytherins were evil, but he was beginning to realize that it was foolish and childish to generalize.

“Magical and non-magical ingredients, all with unique properties and compositions, can be combined to bottle fame, brew glory, even put a stopper to death,” Snape finished, his voice a low hiss.

“Potter!” said Snape suddenly. Both Eric and Harry sat up straighter in their seats. For a fleeting moment, they looked to one another and grinned, used to both responding to the same beckon. It was only for a second, though – soon Eric’s playful eyes soured and he frowned, snapping back to Snape.

“Eric Potter, I should clarify,” Snape elaborated, realizing his mistake. “What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?”

Eric held his breath, as he normally did when concentrating hard. Snape’s jaw was set in a decidedly triumphant position while he looked down his long hooked nose at the boy. Snape was just opening his mouth triumphantly when Eric said slowly, “The Draught of Living Death... I think?”



Snape's eyebrows flicked upwards momentarily in surprise, and then his face resumed his usual stern expression. Harry, too, was impressed. Although Lily had drilled Eric in a few of the first year spells and other things that he might need know, Harry always assumed that Eric hadn't been listening closely enough to remember.

It seemed that Harry had been proven wrong, which didn't happen often. Eric was quite brilliant, however, so Harry shouldn't have been surprised. His brother just had always seemed more interested in having fun or playing Quidditch than studying.

"Indeed..." Snape responded slowly. "Eric Potter: where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Harry remembered this from reading his potions book in his room last week, but couldn't recall Lily covering the information with Eric. Eric was biting his lip in concentration, his hazel eyes staring tensely at the table before him. "I don't know," he finally admitted.

"Tut, tut – fame clearly isn't everything," drawled Snape as his lips curled into a sneer.

"That's not fair, Professor, we weren't even required to look into the books beforehand," insisted Ron Weasley suddenly, defending his friend.

"Does anyone judge greatness on knowing what one's been required to know, Mr. Weasley? I think not. Three points from Gryffindor for speaking without being spoken to, I might add," finished Snape with satisfaction.

Ron silently fumed but said nothing.

"What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?" he shot out to the class in general. The bushy-haired girl's hand shot straight up, just as it had for the last two questions Snape had asked. Harry knew the answer but instead sat back, watching and taking in information for later. These first classes were crucial to understanding Snape's style and what he expected.

“Yes, Miss Granger?” he sighed, as if letting her answer the question was a burden upon him. Harry on one level could agree – the girl’s enthusiasm was almost overbearing.

“They are the same plant, Professor,” she answered confidently.

“Correct. And what is another alternative name for the plant, Miss Granger?” he added, his voice sickeningly and mockingly sweet.

She seemed to have an answer halfway out of her open mouth before her eyes fell and shoulders visibly drooped. “I don’t know, sir,” she admitted, looking both ashamed and embarrassed.

“Anyone?” Snape queried, pacing around the students again. Harry decided on a whim that it was time for him to speak up, and he raised his hand.

“Yes Mr. Potter?” said Snape, interested black eyes flashing in his direction.

“Aconite is its alternative name, sir,” he responded neutrally.

“Indeed,” replied Snape. “Five points to Slytherin.”

The Gryffindors shuffled with unrest and glared at both Snape and Harry in outrage. Their own Potter had gotten a question right, but they had not received any house points. Harry suddenly felt like he had made a grave mistake in making enemies so early, and resolved to speak up in class as little as possible from now on.

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The crisp weeks of September passed rather quickly in retrospect. Harry hadn’t received any word from his parents, which both concerned him and suited him just fine. They were continuing along with their tradition of ignoring him, at least... and yet Harry had thought that having a son in Slytherin might have garnered enough of their attention to send him a note.

Harry spent much of his time lurking about, trying not to be noticed too much, and simply learning how Slytherin house functioned. It became increasingly evident that power came and went among the older students as they vied for respect and authority in each others' eyes. Harry quickly learned that Lyrian Derrick, the fifth-year prefect that had led them to the common room, had been 'leading' Slytherin for quite some time now.

Consequently, everyone with dreams of gaining power spent a great deal of time trying to become as close as possible to the golden-haired boy. Draco Malfoy, especially, had taken to asking Lyrian questions about some of the more advanced transfiguration techniques that he had read about, despite not being able to perform any of them himself. Harry thought it was blatantly obvious that Malfoy just wanted to be seen and associated with Lyrian, but he kept his observations to himself.

Malfoy still seemed to be keeping a close watch on Harry, but he wasn't nearly as outwardly hostile to Harry as to Eric. Eric was for the most part avoiding Harry. It wasn't very hard to, as Harry of course wouldn't go out of his way to be noticed, and Gryffindors only had Potions with the Slytherins anyway.

On the chilly last day of September, Harry sat characteristically alone at the Slytherin table. It was six o'clock; most of the other students wouldn't even dream of waking so early, but Harry had always been prone to rising before dawn. The rosy sunlight was just appearing in the enchanted ceiling of the Great Hall, washing the walls with a soft orange-pink glow.

"Potter," a girl's voice called from behind him. Harry jumped. He hadn't even heard anyone coming; he had been so immersed in his thoughts. He craned his neck back just to see Tracey Davis sit down beside him, her chestnut hair tied up in a bun, the strands looking almost red in the morning light.

"Davis," he replied in her same businesslike manner.

"I have an offer for you," she began intriguingly. Light brown eyes regarded his own emerald ones speculatively.

“Oh?” Harry replied, his interest piqued. Though Tracey Davis had not talked much to him in the first few weeks, she had made no noticeable attempt to befriend or make enemies with anyone else, either. Her only occasional companion had been Millicent Bulstrode. Like him, she must have seen the use in remaining out of the Slytherin public eye until she knew which side to take.

“You are undoubtedly talented in all of our classes so far, especially Charms and Transfiguration. I, as I’m sure you’ve noticed, have trouble in those particular subjects. If you will tutor me until you find that I have a sufficient grasp of the basics, I will teach you how to spellweave,” she finished, rather rushing at the end. Despite her formal talk, Harry could easily see a measure of nervousness in her eyes. He also made note of the way that she would curl her fingers inwards to her palms, as if trying to release anxious energy.

“Spellweave?” Harry echoed, cursing his own ignorance. He hadn’t heard of such a branch of magic study, despite all of his reading.

At this Davis’s anxiousness seemed to fade, as she suddenly glowed with intensity and pride. “Yes, speallweave. My mother’s family was once famous for their amazing spellweavers. It has since become a somewhat arcane branch of magic... more of math than magic, though, really... but I’ve a basic training in it,” Davis explained.

“I’m afraid I’m still not clear on what, exactly, spellweaving is.”

“Spell creation and modification, in short,” responded Davis.

Harry tentatively nibbled at his toast. This sounded interesting. To be able to create his own spells – fascinating! But it was only at the cost of teaching her Charms and Transfiguration on the side? It seemed too good of a deal to him, and he still did not trust Slytherins to make their motives clear. Despite his suspicions, this was far too much of a chance to pass up.

“I’ll do it,” he agreed.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Potter," Davis smirked. "Will next Friday after potions class work for you?"

"I suppose I can make room in my busy schedule," he replied thoughtfully, eyes glinting with amusement.

"Well I'll be seeing you then," she agreed, her light brown eyes catching his gaze in confirmation.

"Indeed."

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True to her word, after Potions on Friday Tracey Davis made a show of collecting her papers and putting her potions supplies away very slowly. She scrubbed her cauldron quite deliberately and made momentary eye-contact with Harry when the room was almost empty. Harry finished getting his things together slowly as well, and then left the classroom nonchalantly on his own, sensing Snape's suspicious dark eyes on his back. He waited outside for a minute, and then Tracey emerged as well.

"Where to?" Harry asked quietly.

"The Slytherin common room will be too busy, and the Great Hall is obviously far too out in the open. We don't want to be seen by Lyrian or Draco, or any other who might assume we're friends. If you have everything you need with you, I'd suggest we go outside, down the hill from the half-giant's hut," she responded logically, looking to Harry for confirmation.

"Yeah I've got everything I need in my bag, we'll be fine there," he agreed. "You go out the front entrance, by the Great Hall; I'll take the east pass to the grounds and we'll meet there."

"Perfect," she replied, and the two set off their separate ways.

Someone in another house might think that their measures to avoid being seen together were extreme, but Slytherin was unlike any other house in Hogwarts. There came a time in every Slytherin's career

where he or she would have to declare unspoken allegiance to one of the many levels of “Slytherin society” simply by the company he or she kept. Sometimes Harry envied students like Draco, whose paths were laid out so easily before them to go into servitude to the Dark Lord – should he return, that was.

Then there were other students, like Lyrian Derrick, who were relatively neutral as far as Slytherins were concerned. Lyrian had done an unusually thorough job of befriending those on paths to power with Voldemort, while simultaneously managing to avoid speaking against those who participated in dark magic or pureblood rituals, but did not declare with Voldemort. All Slytherins – the ones who were sane, anyway – did not support light magic or back Dumbledore. Even Lyrian was openly against those aims.

Harry stepped out onto the grounds and began the walk towards Hagrid’s hut. He knew that Eric and Ron often came to visit the half-giant, although Harry was fairly certain that the Gryffindors didn’t know of Hagrid’s giant ancestry. They didn’t talk about blood in Gryffindor like they did in Slytherin; one’s ancestors and roots were everything amongst the snakes, so it was common knowledge that Hagrid was a half-breed. Only Dumbledore’s protection of Hagrid from the Slytherin parents had kept the gamekeeper from getting tossed out of the school for being a potential liability.

Harry found a rather secluded area past Hagrid’s pumpkin patch and sat down to wait for Tracey Davis. Sure enough, a minute or so later she appeared, walking down the grassy knoll.

“So,” she began as she approached, “You tutor me in Charms and Transfiguration first, and then I’ll introduce you to spellweaving,” she suggested, her light brown eyes seeming to challenge him.

“I’d rather tutor you in Charms first, then you tell me about this spellweaving, and I’ll finish up with Transfiguration,” Harry offered, crossing his arms. Although it was unlikely that she would shirk her side of the deal, it was practically etiquette in Slytherin to make compromises so that no one was at the obvious disadvantage.

Tracey smirked in a way that reflected that she was glad that Harry knew how to play this game. "Fine then, that will do," she agreed primly.

Harry set to it right away. Charms were his specialty so far in school, and it had always been his favorite subject to read about at home. There was something extremely satisfying about mastering so many simple spells that could be used in some potentially very complex ways.

Tracey was a very quick learner, Harry soon discovered, but she had a lot of problems getting her wand motions correct. Her hand always seemed to jerk too much when casting, which was quite a problem for some spells that required more of a gentle swishing motion.

"You've got the flick part of it right, it's the swish you need to work at," he explained as Tracey tried to cast the levitating charm on a long piece of grass they'd plucked from the earth.

"Keep your motion to a gentle arc to the left there, then complete the circle. I think of it as drawing a three-dimensional graph in the sky, so to speak – if you can picture where the wand has to go, like you're seeing a design laid out before you, then you just follow the track when you cast it. Like this," he demonstrated.

"Cerulem Viam," he said, reciting a simple colour charm that he'd learned about in a book. Dark blue light glowed in a small ball out of the point of his wand. He then slowly traced the wand movement for Wingardium Leviosa in the sky, and the blue color remained where his wand point had been. He then mentioned the counter charm to stop the blue light from flowing from the end of his wand.

"Wow, that's a really... ingenious way to demonstrate wand motions," she admitted, turning to him in surprise. "No wonder you understand them so easily."

He hid his blush at the praise. No one, especially not his parents, had ever praised him like that. He'd only received the bland "good job," and even that was a rare event.

Tracey followed her wand through the path of blue that still hung suspended in the air. She then took a shot at the spell again. "Wingardium Leviosa!" she cried.

The grass stalk rose and hovered easily in the air, and Tracey looked to him with a relieved and grateful smile. For once, it wasn't a smirk, and Harry was surprised at how much the authentic expression transformed her features. She didn't look so dark and hard anymore, but instead full of life and flushed.

"Thank you," she said sincerely. "Now to my side of the deal, I suppose?"

"That's what I'm here for," Harry replied, effectively cutting off any bond of friendship that might have begun to form over the cooperation. She fleetingly looked hurt, but then went straight to business, brushing all emotion off of her face.

Harry felt a twinge of regret at denying her a chance at friendship, but then reminded himself that friends were deadly in Slytherin. Starting to care about someone was only an invitation to get hurt in the future, when they couldn't follow the same path.

"Spellweaving is an extremely difficult branch of magic, and only a handful in a century can become masters. Arithmancy is sort of related – that's the study of the magical properties of numbers, you know – but it's not always used," Tracey explained.

"For the most part, spellweavers work on spell modification, which involves changing wand movements, the inflection and emphases of the incantations, and sometimes even the words to the spells themselves. It's often very dangerous to meddle with changing a spell's meaning, but there are some general guidelines that allow one to do certain changes with little risk."

"Like what?" Harry asked, intrigued.

"Well, for example, I know that changing the ending of a spell to a pronounced vowel most often makes it a more powerful spell. For



spells that already have vowels at the end, you can't do much about it, but, well, there you are," she shrugged. "That's what makes this such an uncertain line of work. Rules can't be applied across the board."

"Interesting," responded Harry genuinely, sitting back against the hill in thought.

"Try it with that colour charm," she suggested. "Instead of Cerulem Viam, try Cerulem Via, and make sure to open your mouth wide to exaggerate the vowel ending."

Harry stood and gripped his wand. "Cerulem Via," he chanted, giving special attention to the "ahh" at the end of Via. Intense, crackling blue light emerged from his wand tip, noticeably brighter and more vivid than before.

"Wicked," Harry grinned, his emerald eyes alight with excitement. Tracey, too, seemed impressed.

"That's way more power than I've ever managed with that sort of thing," she admitted enviously. "Very good, Potter."

Harry muttered the countercharm and turned to face her, still bright with anticipation about this new development.

"Transfiguration now?" she suggested slyly, knowing that the hint she had given him about spellweaving was a tantalizing way to get him to agree to future tutoring sessions.

"Yes, ma'am," he responded, his lips curled into a respectful grin, and the two set to work again.

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The introduction to first-year Quidditch lessons was scheduled for a week later, that next Saturday afternoon. It was, unfortunately, another Gryffindor/Slytherin class, and while Harry was relieved that it wasn't a core subject that he had to take with Eric and the others, it still made him wary and unexcited to go.

That was really unfortunate, too, because he was a pretty good flyer and loved being on a broom, so these classes should have been a treat.

At three-thirty, Harry and the other Slytherins hurried down the front steps onto the grounds for their first flying lesson. The day was clear and breezy – perfect for flying, Harry mused – and the grass rippled under their feet as they marched down the sloping lawns towards a flatter area.

“My father told me how getting on the Quidditch teams is all about connections in Slytherin. People without respectable status have a Mudblood’s chance in Knockturn Alley of getting on the team,” Draco Malfoy drawled to the Slytherins, who flanked him on either side.

They all chuckled at the thought of a little muggleborn getting stuck in the traditional dark, pureblood sector of the wizarding city, and Harry laughed along with them. Realizing he, too, was beginning to think of muggleborns as ‘Mudbloods’ cut his laughter short. It was hard, though, not to think of them under that term when it was practically creed in Slytherin to call them the more offensive name. Harry shuddered at the thought of how his family might react if they knew he was adapting to Slytherin ways.

“So, naturally, I’m practically guaranteed a spot on the team next year,” Draco continued easily.

Blaise Zabini spoke up suddenly, “That is, if you’re any good on a broom, Malfoy.”

“Are you suggesting otherwise, Zabini?” Draco challenged, blonde eyebrows arched confrontationally.

“Not at all,” Blaise smirked, his dark eyes sparkling, “But we Slytherins do have standards, you know, and it wouldn’t do to lose the Quidditch cup merely on account of status. You know what they say; even the biggest dragons can have all smoke and no flame.”

Draco opened his mouth to retort when Madam Hooch reached them and cut off any response Draco might have had. She had short, gray hair, and yellow eyes like a hawk.

“Well, what are you all waiting for?” she barked. “Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up.”

Harry looked towards the twenty broomsticks placed in neat lines on the ground. Most of them had twigs askew or scrapes and dents in the handles, and Harry frowned with distaste. He knew that such overused, badly-maintained brooms started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to one side or another.

He strode over to stand beside the nearest broom. It was old and some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles. He glanced up, and noticed that Eric was placed across from him, inspecting his own broom with revulsion. Eric had always had the best toy brooms, and then the most expensive real brooms when he got older. Their parents wouldn't settle for anything less, of course.

“Stick out your right hand over your broom,” called Madam Hooch at the front, “and say ‘Up!’”

“UP!” everyone shouted in unison.

Harry's broom jumped into his hand at once, as did Eric's. Hermione Granger's had simply rolled over on the ground, and Harry noticed that Neville Longbottom's hadn't moved at all. Similarly, Crabbe's had done an odd little jerk and then settled down once more, while Daphne Greengrass's was still twitching in her hand, like it wanted to fall down once more. Most of the other students seemed to have gotten the desired result though, Draco included.

Madam Hooch then showed them how to mount their brooms without sliding off the end, and then she walked through the rows pointing out problems with their grips. Eric and Ron began to snicker when she told Draco he'd been doing it wrong for years.

“It's simply a matter of style, you old bat,” Draco grumbled as she continued on, but his face was flushed, and Harry wasn't fooled.

“Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground, hard,” Hooch explained. “Keep your brooms steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle – three – two –”

Suddenly Neville Longbottom pushed off hard before the whistle even touched the flying instructor’s lips, and he began to shoot straight up into the sky, starting out slow, but then going faster at an alarming speed. He gasped, slid sideways, and began to fall to earth, landing with a flat thud and a faint crack.

“Oh, dear... broken wrist,” Hooch shook her head in exasperation as she examined him on the ground. He was laying there, moaning pathetically in pain and shock. “Come on, boy – it’s all right, up you get.”

“Now none of you is to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you’ll be out of Hogwarts before you can say ‘Quidditch.’”

And with that, she hoisted Neville up and guided him up to the castle.

“Did you see his face, the great lump?” Draco laughed.

“Shut it, Malfoy,” Eric snapped.

“Oh I suppose you think you’re much better off, Potter. I bet you’re just as clueless in the air as Longbottom!” Draco antagonized, daring Eric to challenge him.

“As if, Malfoy,” sniffed Eric. “You’ll see when I get on the team next year, easy.”

“What’s this?” Draco pointed, bending over to look at something in the grass. “Look’s like Longbottom’s dropped his Remembrall. Stupid device, really, no good for anything useful at all.”

He tossed it up and caught it again in his hand casually.

“Maybe I’ll leave it somewhere for him to find – should he remember he lost it (at this the Slytherins snickered) – how about, up a tree?”

“No, Malfoy,” Eric began to insist, but Draco had already mounted his broom and rose up to the top of the tallest tree in the vicinity, hovering next to its branches.

Eric hopped on his broom but didn’t rise, obviously itching to take off but not wanting to threaten his position at Hogwarts. His hazel eyes were stormy and dangerously fierce as he gazed at Draco lounging in the sky.

“Or perhaps,” Draco suggested slyly, “We could have ourselves a little contest. A little competition to see which house is better, hmm?”

“What are you getting at, Malfoy?” Eric demanded, brushing his dark brown fringe out of his eyes to see the pale boy better.

“I’m proposing that we use a bit of sibling rivalry to our advantage. How about the brothers Potter race to catch this before it hits the ground. If you win, Gryffindor is victorious, I suppose, and you get to keep Longbottom’s silly Remembrall safe,” Draco rolled his eyes.

“And if Harry wins,” Eric asked, darting his gaze to his twin for a moment.

“Well then, Slytherin is obviously the winner and we get to smash the Remembrall... and we get to charm your clothes green and silver for a day, so everyone can know how – shall we say, spirited – you all are.”

The Gryffindors might see the charming as a rather ridiculous wager, but it had far more significance in Slytherin than it did in Gryffindor. The Slytherin first years would gain respect in the eyes of the older students – especially Draco – and well, Harry would too. This was also a test of Harry’s allegiance, though; an especially devious and malicious way to make the Potter twins show their sides out in the open.

“What do you say, Potters?” Draco chuckled maliciously.

"I'm in," Harry replied immediately. He wasn't about to lose face in Slytherin for backing down... that would be suicide.

Eric took longer to decide. "I'm game... except if we win, we get to charm your stuff red and gold for a day, too. It's only fair."

"Frankly, I don't think you're at a position to negotiate, Potter," Draco pointed out. "Unless you just want me to smash this Remembrall now, this precious present from Longbottom's grandmother?"

Eric growled but then agreed. "Fine."

"Both of you line up evenly, then," Draco ordered. Harry could tell he was enjoying the position of power.

"Be careful, Eric," Hermione Granger whispered as Eric came shoulder to shoulder with his brother. "Madam Hooch told us not to move – you'll get us all in trouble!"

Eric ignored her. He made eye contact with Harry, and the two stared at each other for a moment, deep hazel against brilliant emerald, brother versus brother. There was very little trace of the kind-hearted, playful boy Harry had grown up with. This was Eric staring down his enemy.

"One... two..." Draco counted as he played with the Remembrall in his hand. Blood pounded in Harry's ears. "Three!"

The two of them took off, skyrocketing towards the Remembrall, which Draco had thrown towards the far end of the field. Harry was vaguely aware of cheering and yells behind them, but he paid no heed; his position in Slytherin depended upon this match.

Draco had thrown the small ball fairly high, but it went so far that now it was arcing down to the ground, heading faster and faster toward the earth. Harry and Eric were neck and neck, practically moving as a single unit, when Harry calculated the fall of the ball better and began to angle downward just a bit earlier than his twin.

He started to take the lead when they neared fifteen feet from the ground – now twelve – they were both reaching out their hands now, but being left-handed, Harry had to adjust and use his right hand to hold the broom so that he could reach out to get it – Eric was brushing up against him so that he could not reach with his preferred hand....

Harry felt Eric's fingers scrabble on top of his, and then Eric batted his hand away, getting under it. A shock ran up Harry's spine as he realized Eric was in a position to grab it.

Harry tilted the front of his broom downward even though the earth was rapidly coming towards both of them, and he dipped under Eric, pushing the old broom as hard as he could for one more burst of speed. His hands knocked the Remembrall upwards on accident, but even as he hit it, he was expecting the shift more than Eric, who continued downwards as Harry suddenly leveled out and swooped up.

The Remembrall was soon in Harry's grasp as he flew upwards once more, sighing with relief that he hadn't failed at this crucial task. He glanced down to see Eric below, hovering only a couple feet from the ground, looking shaken and dejected.

But when Eric stopped and turned upwards to face Harry, he wasn't shaking with tears or looking upset. No, Eric's face was contorted in anger, his eyes flashing venomously and his lips flat in a tight, pale line, with his jaw thrust outward, trembling.

"I hate you," said Eric lowly, his voice deeper than Harry had ever heard it.

For as much as Harry had thought of Eric as a stupid, spoiled child, it pierced him deeply. "Eric...I –" his voice trailed off, but before he could continue Draco was calling them back, and Eric turned to go.

"Do the honors now, Harry," Draco said sweetly once they were back, looking extremely pleased that the stunt had worked out. He gestured to the Remembrall clutched in Harry's hands.

Harry stood frozen for only a fraction of a second. He couldn't show weakness, not here, not ever. It was already too late – Eric couldn't seem to hate him any more. The rest of the students had come and gathered around them, forming a crowd.

He dismounted his broom and chucked the Remembrall as hard as he could at the nearest tree trunk, and it hit with a shatter. Lavender Brown, a blond Gryffindor girl, yelped as the shrill crash split through the air.

“POTTER!”

Harry's heart sank faster than he'd just dived. Professor McGonagall was running toward them. He turned toward her, standing tall but wincing in the face of her anger.

“Not just you, Harry Potter, but you too, Eric!” she yelled as Eric tried to make himself one of the crowd. Well, at least the harsh old lady was fair and would punish her own house too.

“Never – in all my time at Hogwarts –”

She was almost speechless with shock, and her glasses flashed furiously. “—how dare you – might have broken both your necks –”

“But Professor, Malfoy –” Parvati Patil protested.

“Be quiet, Miss Patil, I'm taking these boys to the headmaster!” she snapped, leading the two of them back to the castle. Harry made very sure not to look anywhere in Eric's direction. He was afraid of what he might see on his once-friendly brother's face.

They approached a stone gargoyle to whom McGonagall gave the password (sherbet lemon) and then led the two of them up to a door, which she rapped on twice.

“Come in,” an aged voice sounded from within.

She opened the door and before them sat Albus Dumbledore, beacon of the light, defeater of Grindelwald, and Chief Warlock of the



Wizengamot. His light blue eyes twinkled behind half-moon spectacles. "What appears to be the problem, Minerva?"

"These boys were caught outside riding school brooms after explicitly being told not to by Madam Hooch. And they weren't just riding," she elaborated, her words getting more intense by the second, "Oh no. They were racing and diving dangerously to the ground!"

"I see. This is indeed a problem. If something were to have gone wrong, one or both of you boys might have been injured severely, with no adults around to help," Dumbledore insisted. His words sounded strict, but his expression was hardly as serious as McGonagall's.

"It wouldn't do for these two to be expelled, although I cannot impress the importance of your actions upon you, Eric, Harry.... Especially for Eric, such foolhardy and risky behavior cannot be tolerated – you know your fate, Eric. We cannot lose you." Dumbledore explained, completely serious for the first time. "We shall have to notify Professor Snape and have the heads of house come up with fit punishments for you both."

Professor McGonagall nodded, her anger seeming to be mollified somewhat by this verdict, and then looked to Eric. "Mr. Potter," she addressed him, "I should like to see you in my office at eight o' clock tonight. I would like to both discuss something with you and announce your punishment then."

Eric nodded, eyes downcast.

"Harry, I will inform Professor Snape of the events that went on here and have you meet him also at eight o' clock tonight at his office."

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore," Harry responded obediently.

The boys were dismissed from Dumbledore's office, and neither of them looked at the other.

Things were going to be different between them now.

Thanks for reading. Review if you'd like; I appreciate it greatly.

## Chapter 4: Contingency

Severus Snape was one who hesitated very little in life. In his eyes, action, whether it was a mistake or the “right” thing to do, was better than doing nothing at all. And he had been in Slytherin, after all. Inaction is akin to openly siding with the light, there.

When he heard about Harry Potter’s stunt with his stupid twin brother, he had immediately come to the conclusion that the boy needed punishment. Lots of it. Preferably as painful as he could make it, if he had his way. It would befit the Potter boy to be punished in a way that Severus had never seen done for James... but Dumbledore and McGonagall had been too blinded by that famous Potter charm to make any fair decision, back when he was at school.

Snape sneered in disgust. Unbelievable, the whole lot of them.

When Harry Potter knocked on his office door at eight o’ clock sharp, not a moment too soon or too late, Severus did not expect to stray from his original plan.

“Come in, Potter,” said Severus slowly and deliberately. The boy entered and faced him respectfully. He hated that about Harry Potter. The boy was so express and polite that he made it too damn hard to find fault in his actions.

“I have been informed about the events of this afternoon,” Severus began, folding his hands imposingly. As he spoke, he by habit began to use minor Legilimency on the boy to view his memories of the event. “And I am most severely disappointed.”

As he shuffled through the Potter boy’s recollections of the event, he suddenly began to look more closely at the actual fight for the Longbottom boy’s stupid ball. He stopped suddenly as he realized that the boy before him had put a hand to his head and had a pained look on his face. He was slightly concerned about that, but more interested in the memory had seen.

Potter had been going fast, then. In a steep dive, no less. For a very small, round object.

It seemed that Severus Snape had found Slytherin a seeker that would win them the Quidditch Cup back for sure. Terence Higgs, their seeker last year, had been a complete disgrace. Even though he was a seventh year now, it would be easy to take him off the team. But this put Snape in a delicate situation. Not only would it be unorthodox to both reward and punish the boy for his actions, but this was James' son. Did he really want to give James the satisfaction of putting one of his sons on the Quidditch team?

Yes – he realized a moment later. James Potter, come to cheer for Slytherin... the ultimate low for the ultimate Gryffindor.

He looked up at Potter once more and hated him, for his unruly messy hair, and round-rimmed glasses, and most of all for those green eyes of his. Lily's damn eyes. That was the worst part of it by far.

But he could work with this. Yes, indeed.

Potter was still rubbing his head a bit, displaying an unusual sensitivity to Legilimency. Most untrained people couldn't sense delicate touches upon their minds like that. He faced Potter and looked down his nose at the boy, lessening the severity of the punishments he had in mind. "For your foolish actions, I will require you to report to me for detention every night of this week starting tomorrow, also eight o' clock. The week following, you'll be sent to help Hagrid in the Forbidden Forest for as many nights as he needs you. Additionally, if Madam Hooch requires any assistance throughout this year, I've instructed her to call on you for help. Are all of these clear to you, Potter?"

"Yes, sir." The boy kept his visage relatively blank. There was very little indication of anger or disappointment besides a resigned glint in his eyes.

"There is one other condition," Severus Snape continued, smirking at Harry's subtle wince. "You will also be required to join the Slytherin House Quidditch Team as our new seeker, and report to practice as is required throughout the year. No exceptions."

Harry's eyes widened in shock. Severus well knew that this would make him the youngest seeker in about a century, and it did wound him to know that it was James Potter's son that he had bestowed this honor upon.

"You are dismissed," said Snape delicately, standing still as the boy turned and left the office.

It would all be worth it when he saw James rooting for Slytherin, though. Snape grinned widely, anticipating the day.

When Snape later learned that Minerva McGonagall had made the other Potter brat the new Gryffindor seeker, it soured his mood considerably. The old cat couldn't just sit back and let Snape do something without retaliation, could she?

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Harry,

We looked the other way when we heard you were sorted into Slytherin – although we are indeed disappointed and confused. A child of such a light family should be ashamed to be sent into the snake pit, and we expect that you shall at least uphold the Potter family name there and stay true to our ideals. It is a good thing your brother has been sorted into Gryffindor and has done everything right. He, at least, is fresh on his path to lead the light side, and he continues to be a source of pride for our family.

But we've received word from Eric about your disagreement during the flying lessons. Not only does that concern us, but it seems you have an apparent disregard for the rules, you are quick to defend Slytherin students, and you purposely antagonize Eric when the two of you are together.

Do not be a barrier to Eric's growth as he learns and becomes the leader he is destined to be for the fight against Voldemort. You stayed out of his way well enough when you were at home, but your recent actions are both disturbing and deeply disappointing.

Lily and James Potter

Lying on his bed in the Slytherin boys' dormitory, Harry exhaled deeply and continued to take slow, painstaking breaths. He crumpled the letter in one fist viciously. The rush of blood pounded in his ears as he fought to control his anger and pain at his parents' words.

They didn't understand. What the hell was wrong with them, anyway? Who signed a letter to their son with their first names, not the traditional "love, Mum and Dad"? And how could they expect Harry, a Potter in Slytherin, to stand up for the light and "stay true" to the Potter family ideals? It was a laughable thought, absolutely sickening, and despite his rage Harry managed a rather humorless chuckle.

His heart sunk, wondering if Eric had told them yet that Harry had been made Slytherin seeker, just as Eric was now the new Gryffindor seeker. It was cruel of Snape and McGonagall to do that to the two brothers, no matter how much they thought the boys could win the Quidditch Cup for their respective houses. Everyone had to pit Eric and him against each other, a friendly contest – hah! – what a joke.

There was nothing even remotely friendly between Harry and Eric now.

Harry's frustration and anger began to spike erratically, and with each malicious thought, his emotions grew. When Harry smoothed out the letter again, and reread the section about his parents being so proud of Eric, so happy with him, he felt sick. His parents were blatantly insinuating that Harry had only been a naughty, petulant child, and at the outrage Harry's magic suddenly gave a jolt.

The air around Harry started to crackle, like a mini thunderstorm with electricity running through the air. Harry didn't even realize, so upset was he, that tendrils of lightning were beginning to leap up and down the posts on his four-post bed.

A yell tore from Harry's throat in frustration, and having released his voice, he suddenly felt determined to force himself to be empty of

thought and emotion. Dead. Invisible. Anything was better than feeling the pain of never being enough.

The crackling died down, and for the first time the young Slytherin realized it had been there in the first place.

Just as he was starting to marvel at his accidental magic, he caught sight of Theodore Nott, standing motionless in the doorway to their room.

“What the hell was that, Potter?” said Nott flatly in his nasally voice. He was a small, stringy-looking boy with dark eyes and darker hair. His arms were crossed casually as he leaned against the side of the doorway.

“Nothing important, Nott,” Harry dismissed, mind racing as he wondered how much Nott had seen. “Just a surge of accidental magic.”

“Mmm. Maybe. Seemed kind of... severe... for accidental magic, in my opinion,” sneered Nott, whose lips had curled into a smirk, “And then, of course, there’s always a reason for accidental magic – it doesn’t often happen just out of the blue.” He paused, considering this. “Especially at our age. Once we’ve got wands, magic isn’t quite so keen to just explode whenever it pleases.”

Harry just regarded Nott mutely, deciding it was best not to respond to comments like that. Anything he could say would only give away more information. Nott only wanted to get under Harry’s skin, and find out what it was that made him so angry and emotional. They were only first-years, but in Slytherin you had to learn fast to be vicious like that. Slytherins always had to have the upper hand and know everything possible, should the occasion arise where such information would be advantageous to use.

The dormitory was silent for a few tender moments, and then Nott sniffed, giving up on getting a response from Harry, and sauntered to his own bed. Harry wasn’t fooled though; he knew that Nott’s suspicions were aroused and that the stringy boy had gotten the upper hand in that conversation.

Harry silently cursed his stupidity in not noticing Nott arrive at the door of the dormitory. Next time he got a letter from his parents, he'd be better off reading it far away from others. Or burning it on the spot.

That, of course, was assuming they ever sent him another one.

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While Eric certainly detested Harry now, it seemed that the rivalry between the Gryffindor boy and Draco Malfoy was nothing to scoff at either. A week after the flying lesson fiasco, Harry heard that Eric and Ron had been caught out at midnight, apparently because Draco had challenged them to a duel and rather than showing up, had sent Filch there to catch them.

As a result, the two boys had landed nightly detentions for a week involving menial tasks like cleaning the trophy room without magic. Harry internally laughed at the thought of Eric scrubbing away at trophies until his hands got blistered, red, and raw. He then wondered if he was getting rather sadistic nowadays, but then shook the thought away. What did it matter if he was, anyway?

Detentions with Snape had been uncomfortable but bearable. While being in the same room as the hook-nosed potions professor was rather unnerving at times, at least the work wasn't too bad. He'd been assigned a lot of potion preparatory tasks such as slicing lacewing flies or extracting fluid from glumbumbles. The jobs were repetitive but better than scrubbing away at cauldrons or mopping floors.

He also used the time to think about spellweaving. Since his first lesson-exchange with Tracey Davis, he had met with her twice more and she'd given him a few more tidbits of information about the art. Harry had tried researching spellweaving in the library, but it seemed that there were very few books that talked about it in any detail at all – most just mentioned it as another obscure branch of magical knowledge. Like some ancient arts, Harry presumed that learning about spellweaving was predominantly an oral tradition passed down through families.



Tonight was Harry's first trip with Hagrid into the Forbidden Forest. He was to meet the great oaf of a man at six thirty, so they'd have a bit of time before it got too dark. Harry had to admit, as he approached Hagrid's hut wearing a warm green cloak, that the half-giant wasn't one of his favorite people. He was well aware that Eric and his friends visited the man often, but Harry couldn't help but feel like he was talking to somewhat of a heathen.

Then again, it was probably the Slytherin perceptions that were affecting him again. Hmm.

"Lo Harry," Hagrid greeted jovially as Harry approached, his lips parting to reveal a toothy grin.

"Hello," said Harry neutrally, stopping in front of the large man, who was seated on the front step to his hut, an enormous black boarhound panting at his side.

"Right then," said Hagrid, "now, listen carefully, 'cause the forest is a right dangerous place, an' I don' want yeh takin' risks by strayin' from the path. Follow me over here a moment."

He led Harry to the very edge of the forest. He then pointed down a narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into thick black trees. A light breeze lifted their hair as they looked into the forest.

"That's where we're headin'," Hagrid explained. "Jus' last week, someone found silvery shinin' stuff on the ground. That's blood from a unicorn which got hurt real badly by summat. We're goin' to take as many trips that we need in this week to try an' find the poor thing, either ter put it out of its misery or bring it back ter health."

Harry's brow furrowed. What kind of demented creature would hurt a unicorn? Uneasily, he followed Hagrid to the path and, Fang at their side, they began to wind between the thickly growing trees.

They walked for the most part in silence, their eyes cast downward. Every so often, some silver-blue unicorn blood glinted on the ground. Harry kept his wand tightly gripped in his left hand, ready to use it at a moment's notice.

As they walked along, Harry realized that to be honest, he didn't have much of an arsenal to defend himself. Professor Quirrell had spent most of their class time stuttering, talking about vampires and yetis and dragons, and how they were resistant to most types of magic. So really, Harry had learned more about what he wasn't able to defend himself from than how to defend himself from what he could.

After a solid twenty minutes of walking, they approached a clearing in the trees, and heard a definite rustling in the bushes.

"Who's there?" Hagrid called. "Show yerself – I'm armed!"

Thick brush parted, revealing a magnificent creature; half-man, and half-horse. It was a centaur, with a gleaming chestnut body and a long, reddish tail.

"Ronan," Hagrid greeted, relieved. "How are yeh?"

"Good evening to you, Hagrid," said Ronan in a deep, sorrowful voice. "And who is this?"

"I'm Harry Potter, one of the students up at the school," Harry replied warily. Centaurs were said to be very dangerous if provoked the wrong way – especially when a whole herd of them got angry. The forest was getting really dark now; he raised his wand and incanted, "Lumos," so that he could better see the centaur's face.

Ronan flinched and backed up. "What is that?" he snarled, almost letting out a whinny. Now that Harry could see his features better, he wished he hadn't lit up the area. Ronan's eyes were wide and his face wrinkled with a mixture of fear and disgust.

"Whas' wrong?" Hagrid asked, like Harry, mystified as to the problem. "Yer not sensitive to light er anything, right?"

"His wand... that wand is unnatural," Ronan breathed, stamping his hooves in nervousness. He looked to the sky. "Neptune was brighter than ever about three fortnights ago. I suspect it will continue to shine. Mars is on the horizon, while Saturn has fled."

Harry gaped, looking from his wand up to Ronan and his odd ramblings and then back down again.

"I worry that Neptune's brilliance may not desist completely for years to come. We shall see, Harry Potter. For now, I suggest you take that hellish creation out of this forest. Many creatures will not be so friendly when they sense it..." and with that, Ronan backed up a few steps, and then trotted back to where he emerged from the brush. They could hear him galloping away through the forest for a minute afterwards.

"What's all that about, Harry?" asked Hagrid, sounding as shell-shocked as Harry felt. "Summat wrong with that wand of yers?"

The dementor's essence. Somehow, the centaur could sense it. Harry wondered if other magical creatures could as well, but he wasn't too keen on finding out.

"I don't know, Hagrid," lied Harry easily.

"Hmm. Well perhaps yeh should go back ter doing detentions with Professor Snape. Wouldn't do to have centaurs threatenin' yeh left n' right every time yeh enter the forest, would it?"

They made their way back the way they had come, and although it was darker, Harry's unease wasn't due to the night. Something was wrong with his wand, was wrong with him. He felt like with everyone expecting the worst of him, it was only time before he would fulfill those expectations and become something terrible....

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Halloween, Harry mused, had always been a thoroughly depressing holiday. If Voldemort had not attacked the twins that Hallow's Eve ten years ago... well, needless to say, everything would be different for Harry.

The castle was decorated quite elaborately for the Halloween feast; real bats fluttered about the ceiling of the Great Hall while glowing

jack-o-lanterns hung suspended in air, every so often swooping down and cackling in a student's face. As far as feasts went, especially on Halloween, Harry was actually enjoying himself a fair bit. It was very entertaining to watch a jack-o-lantern surprise one of the second year Gryffindor girls so much that she actually let out a scream, and the whole Slytherin table had broken out laughing when a bat got tangled in a Hufflepuff's hair.

Yes, no sooner had Harry decided to relax a little bit, when very suddenly and unceremoniously, the doors to the Great Hall burst open.

Professor Quirinus Quirrell came sprinting into the hall, his turban askew and terror etched on his face. Everyone stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore's chair, slumped against the table, and gasped, "Troll – in the dungeons – thought you out to know."

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint.

The first thought that came to Harry's mind was that the troll was obviously planted here by someone. But how the hell could they get that thing in the castle? Trolls didn't just materialize, and he wasn't sure that something so large and sentient (well, sort of) could be summoned.

Harry's second thought was that something was very off about Professor Quirrell. It all seemed so theatrical – the way he had stumbled into the hall and, having done his duty and having warned the school about the threat, collapsed melodramatically at the headmaster's feet.

Harry's third thought was that he had seen Eric and Ron rush out of the hall as soon as Quirrell finished his announcement, and that the two of them were going to get killed if they were going after the troll. Which, admittedly, was a decidedly Gryffindor-ish thing to do.

He decided he'd better act on that third thought first.

Pulling his wand out, Harry slunk after them, avoiding the uproar and escaping from the room just as he heard Dumbledore get the hall's

attention. He could hear Ron and Eric yelling to each other down the hall, and he followed them until he could see them rushing around the corner down some stairs towards the girls' loo. Before he could follow them around the bend, though, he caught sight of Professor Quirrell running up some stairs in the far hall to his left. That faint sure hadn't lasted long....

"Something's not right here," Harry muttered under his breath.

Harry made his decision quickly. Why was he even running after his brother? That was something an impulsive Gryffindor or a loyal Hufflepuff would do. Eric wouldn't do the same for him, so Harry decided to leave it to fate as to whether he and Ron survived. Bloody rash thing of them to do, that was for sure.

He stopped thinking about his twin and instead sprinted down the hall to tail Quirrell. The young professor had rushed up one of the narrow staircases to the third floor, the very floor that had a large section closed off this year for reasons unknown. When Harry reached the top step, he realized that he might be about to find out why it was prohibited; Quirrell had gone down the forbidden corridor.

At the very end of the hall was a door hanging ever so slightly ajar. Harry approached it, slowing his pace and stepping lightly, and then very tenderly pushed it open further. What he saw within was horrifying.

A monstrous dog, a dog that filled the entire space between ceiling and floor, was snapping at Professor Quirrell. It had three heads with three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in his direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs.

"Conjunctiva!" Quirrell cried, pointing his wand at a pair of the dog's angry eyes. That particular head began whining and blinking in pain, but the other two heads, even more enraged, growled deeply and then started in on Quirrell, teeth flashing dangerously close to his head.

“Get back, you fucking mangy beast!” growled Quirrell, brandishing his wand threateningly. It was the first time Harry had ever heard the man speak without stuttering. “Reducto!”

A jet of red light exploded from Quirrell’s wand, striking another of the dog’s heads, almost at point blank. Deep red blood erupted outward from the dog’s face, revealing a horrific mangled mess where its snout had once been. The acrid scent of burning flesh hung in the air, as the beast howled, reared back, and writhed in pain.

Quirrell, now speckled with the dog’s blood, caught sight of Harry standing frozen at the door. “Potter, what the hell are you doing here? Get out!” he bellowed.

Harry didn’t know how to respond. Before he could even act, the beast noticed him as well. It seemed to decide that Harry was less likely to hurt it, and the dog began to rush toward him.

“Scutus vivendi!” Quirrell shouted desperately, and just as the dog’s teeth were inches from Harry, a solid but glowing white barrier appeared between him and the beast.

As its teeth made contact with the shield, the barrier flickered but held. Quirrell, however, looked extremely taxed from the exertion of holding up the spell. Harry could see why it took so much energy; Quirrell had just conjured a solid shield, for deflecting more than just jinxes, and that was no easy feat.

“Professor!” Harry cried as the dog backed off in confusion and Quirrell dropped the spell, leaning against a wall for support, and breathing heavily.

Harry didn’t know many spells, as a first year, but one of the lesser jinxes came to his mind as he scrambled for a way to protect both him and Quirrell. “Rictusempra!” Harry shouted, jutting his wand forward with exaggerated force.

The dog stopped advancing and instead began panting oddly, letting out snorts on occasion – with the two snouts it still had. Harry realized that it had worked; it was the dog’s way of laughing. He didn’t pause

to think about it long, though. Professor Quirrell was still slumped against the wall, exhausted, and Harry didn't think twice before grabbing him by the arm and stumbling out of the room. He slammed the door shut behind him and then continued to guide Quirrell along the corridor.

"You idiot, Potter," gasped Quirrell. His eyes were drooping and breaths were ragged. He was still smeared with the dog's blood, and to an outside perspective, he must have looked to be quite a scene.

"Professor, what were you doing there?" asked Harry, who was beginning to feel a little angry now that the danger was past. Yes, perhaps it was his fault for being curious, but how was he supposed to know that his "cowardly" defense against the dark arts teacher was going after a massive three-headed dog?

"None of your concern," Quirrell snapped, trying to gather his composure.

"Do you need to go to the hospital wing?" offered Harry, checking his temper. The man had just saved his life, after all.

"They can't do much for spell exhaustion, there," panted Quirrell. "Just lead me to my office, boy... I'll be fine..."

Harry did as he was told. An uncomfortable, unnatural silence filled the castle, and while Harry led his professor up to the next floor, he idly wondered what had become of Eric and Ron. Presumably all of the teachers were either at the troll or with the students in their house common rooms... excepting Quirrell, of course.

As they reached Quirrell's classroom, Harry faced the man seriously. "Professor Quirrell, you saved my life back there. Because of that, I feel compelled to invoke a life debt."

Most of the color had returned to Quirrell's face, and at Harry's pronouncement, his head snapped up, eyes suddenly alight with interest.

"You can name your preferred repayment now, or you can hold onto the debt for whenever you come up with a fitting method," Harry continued solemnly. His parents would be proud... life debts were based upon bonds of strong light magic.

"A life debt, eh?" Quirrell repeated, expression calculative. "I believe I do have a job for you, Potter."

Harry raised an eyebrow. Often, wizards would hold life debts for years before finding a suitable task or action for repayment.

"Firstly, you are not allowed to communicate in any way to others that I do not actually have a stutter. Yes, I put on the act, but it is for my own reasons, and I would like to keep them secret," he stated flatly. "The same goes for this incident. You will tell no one of this encounter, is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now for the favor I wish to ask of you in repayment. As the years go on, you are to report to me bimonthly with any news or updates on the training of your twin, Eric Potter. His years at Hogwarts are his supposed stepping stones on his path to leader of the light and defeater of the Dark Lord. Additionally, if Eric Potter is to be trained in any special way, I expect you to do everything in your power to spy on him and tell me what he is learning." Quirrell's brown eyes flashed with excitement. It was a very odd expression on a person who had, up to this moment, been a scared and fretful man.

This was an unusual request, indeed. A twinge of anger surged through Harry – why did everything have to be about Eric? He would rather be rid of his brother, never to see him again. But everyone kept pushing them together...

"I understand, sir," said Harry, "and I agree to your terms. The debt shall be repaid to the best of my ability."

Harry bowed and saluted Quirrell as was required by the tradition. A flash of white light sealed the deal as ancient magic was invoked.



Harry turned on his heel and exited Quirrell's office, heading toward the Slytherin dungeons.

He finally reached the stone wall, muttered the password ("monkshood"), and stepped into the common room. The place was packed, and all movement stopped as everyone turned to look at the newcomer.

Professor Sinistra, the astronomy teacher, was at the head of the crowd. "Mr. Potter, what have you been doing out?" she said coldly. Her neat black eyebrows were furrowed, suspicion etched in the lines of her face. "While you were gone, we went through roll call, and every Slytherin was present – except you. What do you have to say for yourself, young man?"

"Nothing," he replied pertly, striding into the room. A few students snickered.

"You may wish to revise your story before you face the headmaster, then. While we attempt to determine how the troll was let into the school, we shall take no chances with students' strange behavior," she snapped.

"Any news of the troll, Professor? Have the other professors subdued it, then?" Lyrian Derrick spoke up from the throng of older students. He subtly winked at Harry, leaving the young Slytherin confused. What did Derrick want with him?

"Indeed, the troll has been knocked unconscious," she admitted, voice much more pleasant and soft now. Lyrian seemed to have that effect on everyone. "However... I have been told that in fact, a couple of first year Gryffindors managed it, before the Professors arrived."

"What the hell?" someone shouted.

"I hope they died in the process," another muttered. "Fucking Gryffindorks think they can take anything on."

"Who did it?" asked Pansy Parkinson, her pug-face looking uglier than ever as she scrunched it up in distaste.

“Eric Potter and Ronald Weasley were the two – and apparently they saved the Granger girl from their year, too.” Sinestra looked especially bitter about this. Harry felt fairly sure that she had been a Slytherin back in her day.

“Fuck the golden boy, I say,” spat a sixth year boy named Travis Chambers. “What a bloody show-off... and Dumbledore’s surely going to lap it all up, too!”

Cheers and angry shouts erupted around the Slytherin common room, and Professor Sinistra didn’t even attempt to stop or scold them. Harry joined in without regret. While the commotion was at its height, Harry felt a tap on his shoulder. Lyrian Derrick stood at his side, purposefully not looking directly at the boy.

“Meet me Wednesday after Quidditch practice,” he said lowly out of the corner of his mouth. Harry gave a slight nod in response, but his brain was reeling with questions. Lyrian was on the Slytherin Quidditch team – one of their best beaters in years – but Harry felt fairly certain that this wasn’t about Quidditch at all.

When the room died down and the noise level finally returned to normal, Professor Sinistra found Harry once again. “I didn’t forget, you know. To the headmaster for you,” she said coolly.

Harry sighed and followed her out of the common room. How was he going to explain this one off, without giving away anything about his encounter with Quirrell? For trying to stay out of the limelight, Harry had done a pretty poor job so far. Second time to see the headmaster in two months of school; at this rate, he’d be in Dumbledore’s office ten times a year!

He and Sinistra finally reached the stone gargoyle, gave the password, and went up the spiral staircase to the headmaster’s office. Harry could hear muffled voices from within the little room, and he suddenly had a very bad feeling about this. The astronomy professor knocked on the door three times, and upon receiving word to come in, opened the door, Harry lurking at her heels.

Eric Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger were all sitting in front of Dumbledore's desk, while Professors Snape, McGonagall, and Flitwick stood at the outskirts. Curiously, a couple of older Ravenclaw boys were also in the back by the teachers.

"To what do I owe your visit, Aurora?" Dumbledore inquired politely.

"I've got a student that wasn't in his common room for roll call," Sinistra replied, gesturing at Harry.

"Ah, yes. I shall deal with him and Mistery Bradley and Kent in just a moment. Stand to the side, please, Mr. Potter," requested Dumbledore, eyes twinkling. He then turned to face the three young Gryffindors. "As I was saying, Miss Granger, thoughtless and reckless behavior like yours is very dangerous. Although Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley managed, with some extraordinary luck and skill, to take down a fully-grown mountain troll, it is foolhardy to think you could face one alone with only two months of magical education at your disposal... no matter how many books on them you've read."

Harry stared at the back of Hermione's head in shock. He thought she was smarter than that! She had her head bent down in shame, but Harry sensed a confidence in her that he hadn't felt before. Weird.

"As for you two, I would not recommend acting in such a fashion on a regular basis, for my earlier stated reasons. You are relatively untrained wizards at this point. However, you did indeed protect Miss Granger with an ingenious use of first-year charms, and for that, I applaud you," Dumbledore smiled. His eyes were twinkling more than ever as he spoke to his prize student, his golden boy. "Very well done, Mr. Weasley... Mr. Potter."

Eric's shoulders were straight and proud. Harry suddenly felt very inadequate. Although he had survived his own incident, with a three-headed dog, no less, what had he done? He'd almost gotten himself killed because he was too stunned to react. Meanwhile, his twin had made the Potters and Gryffindor proud by taking control of a situation and rising to the challenge.

"I agree with Minerva's distribution of points for this occurrence, so I believe I have nothing else to say to you three. Please return to Gryffindor tower, and get some rest."

Hermione, Ron, and Eric stood up and turned to leave. Eric purposefully didn't even look at Harry as he passed by, although Hermione gazed at him questioningly on her way out. Harry stared back unflinchingly until she had exited the room.

"Now for you boys," Dumbledore said, addressing the three students in the room. "All of you were reported absent from roll calls at your respective houses, and we are still trying to determine how the mountain troll got into the school. While unlikely that a student is behind this, we are taking no chances with matters of such seriousness."

While Dumbledore was speaking, Harry couldn't help but notice that Professor Snape had not once averted his gaze from Harry since he came into the office. Harry did his best to pretend he hadn't seen this.

"Mr. Bradley, where were you during roll call?" Dumbledore asked, regarding a rather plain Ravenclaw boy in the back.

"Sir, I was in the Owlry, sending a message to my parents. I didn't hear the announcement, and if I had, I swear I would have been on my way to the Ravenclaw common room at once," he said quickly. Dumbledore peered at the boy for a moment, and then responded, "I believe you, Mr. Bradley. You may leave."

He then turned to the other Ravenclaw student. "And Mr. Kent, where were you? Why not attend the Halloween feast with the others?"

"I wasn't feeling well or up to going to the feast, Professor. I was in the library, working on a project," he responded in a rather flat, monotone voice.

"And why does Madam Pince not remember seeing you there?" asked Dumbledore, regarding him over his half-moon spectacles.

Kent appeared rather uncomfortable now. "Look, Professor, I wasn't feeling well and didn't want to talk to anyone else at the time. If you must know, I was avoiding my friends, hiding between the shelves... not out at one of the tables."

Dumbledore watched the boy for a long moment, maintaining eye contact with the Ravenclaw kid the whole time. Harry felt suspiciously as if magic was happening, but couldn't tell how.

"You are excused, Mr. Kent. I will not pry further into matters, as I believe you, too, are telling the truth."

Finally Dumbledore faced Harry, frowning slightly. "Mr. Potter, I wish I was seeing you in my office this time under more pleasant circumstances. What is your alibi for tonight?"

At that very moment, another knock sounded on the door. Professor Quirrell entered, looking no worse for the wear. Any trace of the dog's blood on him was gone, and he looked just as composed as he normally did... which in truth wasn't terribly composed.

"P-p-professor Dumbledore," he stuttered spectacularly, "Is this about P-P-Potter's whereabouts during the event?"

"Why yes, Quirinus. You appear to be looking better after your fainting spell tonight," Dumbledore said kindly, with a little surprise.

"Indeed," Snape agreed from the back of the room, gaze now locked onto Quirrell.

"N-n-no need t-to fret," assured Quirrell, shaking his head slightly, "Mr. Potter was w-w-with me; he helped me back t-t-o my office once I... once I came to."

"Is that true, Harry?"

"Yes sir. It didn't take long for Professor Quirrell to regain consciousness, especially with all the yelling and shouting at the time. When he got up, I offered to accompany to him the hospital wing, but he insisted that he was okay, so I just helped him back to his office,"

lied Harry spectacularly. It sounded completely plausible. Harry felt a slight headache coming on, and wondered if it had anything to do with the way Dumbledore was staring him down. He broke eye contact as soon as he felt the twinges of pain.

“Well then,” Dumbledore resolved, “That was very chivalrous of you, Harry.” While the headmaster still sounded surprised, he seemed to be more suspicious of Harry’s motives for helping Quirrell than suspicious of the story as a whole. “You may return to your common room as well.”

Harry didn’t need to be told twice. He left the office, ignoring the eyes of the adults around him, especially Snape. Once he was well on his way down to the dungeons, he let out a massive sigh. He’d only been at Hogwarts for a couple of months, and already he was getting involved in things way over his head.

He entered the tower and headed up to the first-year boys’ dormitory in silence, glad that the area was mostly empty now. The other boys were for the most part in bed or in the bathroom, so Harry sat down on his own bed and pulled the curtains shut. Lighting his wand, he began to read *Born from Darkness: The Nature of Dark Magic*, using reading the thick text as a way to slow his racing heart.

Before long he grew tired, whispered “nox” to extinguish his wand light, and climbed under his covers. Despite his exhaustion, it took him a long time to fall asleep. There were just too many things that could go wrong, from his meeting with Lyrian Derrick to spying on Eric for Quirrell.

Finally he managed to slumber, but even so, his dreams were dark and troublesome...

You know, I was thinking about how I've never seen Quirrell take a big role, in any story. But to be honest, I think he's a pretty cool guy - apparently (according to HP Lexicon) he was a Muggle Studies teacher originally, and then went to Albania and obviously got involved with Voldemort. If anyone knows of a story or wants to write one about Quirrell's 'decent into darkness' I'd definitely be willing to read. :)

Anyway, thanks so much for reading. :) Please review and tell me what you think!

## Chapter 5: How the Snake Strikes

Harry tilted his broom downward and slowly lowered himself to the ground. He had only practiced a few times with the Slytherin Quidditch team, but he was reasonably sure that things weren't going to get any better. Quidditch wasn't a whole lot of fun with the Slytherins. Marcus Flint, the captain of the team, was a burly sixth year with gnarly teeth and a bad temper. He drove the team hard and wouldn't accept anything but perfection – or else.

Most of the team had already made their way into the locker room, but Lyrian was still working to shove one of the Bludgers into a chained box. Harry strode up next to him.

"Need help with that?"

"Yeah, could you hold the chains open while I push it in?" asked Lyrian, voice strained as he struggled against the movements of the heavy ball. "Nasty little bugger, this one is," he gasped as he finally pushed it into the slot. Harry quickly clasped the lock shut.

"Thanks," said Lyrian, flashing Harry a grin, perfect white teeth shining.

"Not a problem," replied Harry, shifting his weight to his other foot. "So... you wanted to talk to me about something?"

"Right," he said. "Here, let's shower and then get changed into our robes. We're far enough behind the other guys that we'll have the locker room to ourselves once we're done."

Harry agreed and followed the much taller boy into the locker room. The faint splatter of water against tile could be heard near the back, and in the front were three of the team members drying off and getting their robes out of their lockers. Harry walked up to his own locker, tapped it with his wand to open it, and pulled out a towel and some shampoo. Shutting it closed again, he made his way to the back showers and turned on the water.



As he stood under the warm spray, he allowed himself to relax. Being amongst so many older Slytherin boys was not only intimidating, but it could be downright dangerous. Especially for those with bad temperaments, like Flint – if Harry got on anyone's bad side, the locker room could be a terribly effective place for an ambush.

After washing up, Harry turned off the faucet, stepped outside into the now empty locker room, and put on his robes. He could hear Lyrian shuffling on the other side, down the next row of lockers. When Harry was dressed, he waited patiently on a bench for Lyrian to finish.

He didn't have to wait too long. A moment or two later, Lyrian emerged from behind the row of lockers, his golden wet hair tousled. He sat down across from Harry.

"So," Lyrian started. "I don't usually do this sort of thing, even though I could do it all of the time if I wanted to."

Harry raised an eyebrow, wondering where this was going.

"I've come to notice that you're a rather smart kid, staying away from friendships or associations, and all that. Occasionally people will ask me about you – about your loyalties, that is," Lyrian elaborated, his blue eyes glinting mysteriously.

Harry suddenly had a very bad feeling about this. He wasn't used to people asking after him; why couldn't they just leave him alone?

"I'd like to know, myself, what your position is. Although your behavior has been for the most part befitting of a Slytherin, I know the family that you come from. Half-blood, and light. It reminds me much of my own mixed parentage, in fact," he admitted, tilting his head to the side.

"You're not a pureblood?" Harry asked, surprised. It was unusual for half-bloods or mudbloods to be so popular in Slytherin.

"No, I'm not... although I keep that as quiet as I can," Lyrian said softly. "My mother, well, she was a muggle-born witch sorted into Hufflepuff, and my father... he was pure muggle."

Harry fought to keep from openly gaping. Lyrian had essentially no ancestry to back him up or legitimize his position. "Your parents... were? Not are?" he asked slowly.

"That's right," nodded Lyrian. "See, Harry, you're a sharp kid. You notice things when people talk, and you have a lot of potential. Even if you are brother to the Boy-Who-Lived."

Lyrian paused, eyes cast down at the grubby locker room floor. He let out a breath and then looked back up to Harry, his blue eyes locking onto Harry's intense green ones.

"I murdered my parents, Harry," he said, his voice devoid of emotion. "Summer after fourth year. I was sick of it. Sick of the taunting, the whispers, the lies – that I wasn't meant to be in Slytherin, that I was practically a full mudblood myself. I showed them all that I was a true Slytherin. I wouldn't let anything, or anyone... stop me from rising to the top."

Harry felt ill. This kid was insane – mad – some sort of twisted sociopath. "Why are you telling me this?" whispered Harry, trying his hardest to keep the fear out of his voice. As if you could just carry on a normal conversation after a pronouncement like that.

"My parents were dirt, Harry. Muggles... mudbloods... it's all the same to me. I won't commit to service for the Dark Lord should he return, but I do understand his stance on blood purity. And rumor has it that he's not a pureblood, although most of the Death Eaters in the old day thought he was. So I certainly agree with him about hating one's heritage," added Lyrian, deadly serious, a deranged glimmer in his brilliant blue eyes. "I know you're up to more than you let on, Harry, but what I have heard involving you is that you and your brother don't get along, am I right?"

Harry paused. "Right," he responded slowly.

"And your parents? What about them?"

It was hard to be secretive when he was being questioned so bluntly... alone, in a room with a fifteen-year old boy who admitted to

murdering his parents in cold blood. Harry felt helpless, as if he had no choice but to tell the truth.

“Mostly they ignore me. They always have. The only time they ever talk to me is to tell me what a little bastard I’m being, or how I’m not perfect, like Eric,” hissed Harry, familiar rage lighting in his veins.

Lyrian smiled.

“I can help you, Harry. I know what it feels like, to hate where you come from, wishing you could obliterate any trace of your origins. You will have a much tougher job of it than I did, with two parents who can do magic and a whole family that is an icon of the light... but don’t let those petty obstacles stop you. Justice is sweeter than anything you have ever tasted, Harry,” he said conspiratorially, as if sharing a secret that only the two of them were to know. “So knowing this, I have an offer for you.”

Lyrian leaned back against the wall, suddenly appearing to be a charming young man again, confident and attractive. Harry wasn’t fooled.

“I can teach you some of the dark arts and some skills that will allow you to destroy your family from the inside out. In return, I only ask that you do not tell anyone of my parentage. I’ve come too far to start those rumors up again – obliterated too many inquisitive minds, and convinced the rest.” He paused and then grinned. “And if you manage to take down Eric Potter in the process, then it’s all the better for the both of us.”

“What’s in it for you?” asked Harry guardedly. Slytherins never did anything without a benefit for themselves.

“Me?” repeated Lyrian. “You obviously don’t know the satisfaction of destruction, Harry. Knowing that I am behind the fall of one of the most prominent light families of our time? Knowing I am helping a Slytherin much like myself to strip away the barriers that hold him back? It’s not charity, my young friend; it’s the way the snake strikes. This is what I love to do.”

Troubled, Harry ran a hand through his raven hair. This was insane... plot to kill his parents? Sure, he had been neglected, but that wasn't reason for them to die....

"Don't over-think it, Harry. What have they ever done for you? Don't they deserve to suffer for their sins? This is revenge, revenge for all the times you sat back and hated them, hated the way they made you feel about yourself. I know the pain, Harry. Don't let them go unpunished," whispered Lyrian vehemently.

"I'm just a first-year. Even if I wanted to, what could I do to them – a fully trained witch and wizard?" wondered Harry aloud. This was madness, but Lyrian's words were doing their job; blood sizzled in his veins, eager for vengeance.

"You won't be getting much done at first. It takes years to plan such an assault, and years to learn the magic and skills required. I didn't manage until my fourth year, and I had a much easier job to do than yours will be. I'm just offering to start you along the path and help you until I graduate Hogwarts," Lyrian explained.

"Okay," Harry said tentatively in response. He still wasn't sure that he wanted them dead, but he could always cop out later if he didn't want to go through with it. He might learn a thing or two from Lyrian in the process. "I'll do it."

"Good man, Harry," Lyrian smirked, standing up. The older boy offered a hand, and once Harry stood up, they shook. "I'll contact you when I have some free time to begin your lessons. I've a busy schedule, though, so be forewarned – our meetings might be at odd times."

"That's fine," replied Harry faintly, still a little shocked at what he'd agreed to.

"See you around." With that, Lyrian Derrick strutted out the Slytherin locker room, as if he hadn't a care in the world. As Harry watched him leave, he couldn't help but feel as if he'd agreed against his will – that he was going to be used for a sick fifteen-year-old's fun.

- - -

Along came mid-November, and with it the first Quidditch match of the season: Gryffindor versus Slytherin. It was a cold, blustery morning, and Harry suspected they'd get the first snow of winter later that week. Temperatures were certainly cold enough for snow; that was certain.

The mountains around the school had become icy gray and the lake was like chilled steel. Every morning the ground was covered in frost. There was sure to be a lot of scarves and overcoats at the upcoming match.

Harry was just finishing up his breakfast of toast and marmalade, although admittedly, he hadn't eaten much. Instead, he'd just nibbled a few bites of it while sitting at the Slytherin table, dreading the upcoming game. It wasn't so much that he was afraid of losing, though that was certainly a concern. No, his main worry was that he knew that his parents would be there, coming to cheer on Eric.

They must have been so proud that their son made the team, Harry thought spitefully.

He set down the remains of his toast and pushed away from the table. Sonia Moon was sitting to his right, leisurely reading a novel of some sort while she had a bit of tea. He envied her casual attitude.

On his way out to the Quidditch pitch, the pit in Harry's stomach deepened. A perfect Catch-22, he thought sadly. I'm damned if I win and damned if I lose. If he won, his parents, his brother, and all of Gryffindor would be out to get him or hating his guts – even more than usual. If he lost, Snape, Marcus Flint, and the rest of Slytherin would probably make his life hell.

He'd already renounced his parents (privately, anyway) but there was still some part of him that wanted them to see him win over his 'superior' brother. Especially since he'd be winning at his brother's obsession – nothing less than Eric's favorite game and true love.

Harry made his way down to the Quidditch pitch early so that he might have some time to settle his nerves before the game. He sat in the locker room for far longer than was necessary, his thoughts shifting from wanting to please his parents to thinking about how only a week ago, he'd been talked into training to kill them.... The whole concept still seemed ludicrous to Harry. He felt a little dirty, like he'd just been tricked into being Lyrian's little play tool.

He sighed and attempted to clear his thoughts. There was no use thinking about that now; he had a game to play.

Before long, all seven Quidditch players had gathered in the locker room for a pre-game pep talk. Everyone was clad in their emerald green Quidditch robes as they formed a small circle. Harry wondered how Flint would go about the captain's speech.

"All right men," Flint started, his voice bristly. "First game of the season, and who are we fighting?"

"The fuckin' Gryffindors!" A third year chaser, Adrian Pucey, shouted with a feral grin.

"That's right we are," snarled Flint. "So that means we know they're pretty-boys who play the game the 'safe' way, who get whiny if someone steps a toe out of the rulebook."

Lyrian snorted. "Just like off the field, too." General agreement echoed around the room.

"But in the real world, no one plays fair. So fuck it. Do whatever you need – whatever it takes – to win. That's the Slytherin way."

They all grinned, feeling a sudden kinship as members of the same house and team. Harry reveled in the rush of acceptance. He was part of a team, and he shared in their ideals, and he knew they wanted the same things he did.

"So now it's time for anyone with information to speak up. What do you know about the Gryffindor team this year? Where are their weak points?" Flint demanded of the other boys.

"That Bell girl, a new second-year chaser... she has a tendency to shoot for the right hoop more often than center, and hardly ever for the left one, though she feints there all the time. Keep that in mind, eh Bletchley?" someone offered.

"Got it," responded their keeper, Miles Bletchley.

"The Weasley twins focus on the chasers to a fault... they hardly ever target the seeker or the other beaters. If you can distract the beaters from the chasers by beating it back to them constantly, do that, okay? Bole, Derrick?" Flint supplied.

Lyrian and the other beater nodded. Bole cracked his knuckles menacingly.

Harry gathered his courage and spoke up. "Eric Potter has a terrible sense of what's going on elsewhere on the field. He's good on a broom and decent at finding the snitch and stuff, but he's rarely played with real bludgers."

Harry felt a thrill as the team listened to him like an equal. Lyrian gave him a slightly disturbing wink. "I'll watch out for him specially, Potter."

"Good points, everyone," Flint praised gruffly. "Now it's time to slaughter those bloody lions!"

The team broke out in cheers, their hearts racing as one.

"And if you don't win..." Flint added, "expect to wish you were never born for next week's practice." He sneered and grabbed his broom, leading them out onto the field.

Harry felt as if Flint's speech could have done without that last sentence, but followed the older boy nonetheless. The rest of the team followed in single file, looking strangely like a procession of monks, all dressed in their matching robes.

The crowd cheered wildly as both teams made their way out onto the field. Harry remembered with a shock that his parents were somewhere in the stands, undoubtedly cheering for his twin.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her broom in her hand.

“Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you,” she said, once they were all gathered around her. Harry noticed that she seemed to be speaking particularly to Flint, who smiled back at her innocently. “Mount your brooms, please.”

Harry clambered onto his Cleansweep Seven, the same broom that the old seeker, Terence Higgs, used to ride. Terence didn't seem to be too bitter about being pushed to reserve seeker, or for letting Harry use his broom, and for that Harry was grateful.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle. Fifteen brooms rose up high, high into the air. They were off.

“And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor – what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too –”

“JORDAN!”

“Sorry, Professor.”

Harry frowned at the commentary as he circled the pitch. Of course they'd have a biased commentator. Whose bright idea was it to allow a Gryffindor student to announce, when Gryffindor was one of the teams playing? Harry added it onto a growing mental list of ways that Slytherins were disrespected by the school.

“And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve – back to Johnson and – no, the Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – Flint flying like an eagle up there – he's going to score... and yes, Gryffindor Keeper Wood misses the ball... Slytherins score...” the boy's voice



had lost much of its enthusiasm, and only a small section of the crowd cheered, presumably just the Slytherins.

Harry swooped past some of the stands and noticed many spectators peering into the cold air with binoculars. He shuddered as he realized his parents were probably in one of the box seats.

“Gryffindor in possession of the Quaffle – that’s chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and – OUCH – that must have hurt, hit in the shoulder by a Bludger – Quaffle taken by the Slytherins – that’s Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goal posts, but he’s blocked by a second Bludger from George Weasley... or was it Fred? – nice play by the Gryffindor beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle – come on now, Angelina – she shoots and Keeper Bletchley dives – misses – GRYFFINDOR SCORES!”

Cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans from the Slytherins. The crowd’s roar was considerably louder than last time; it seemed that the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were rooting for Gryffindor too. Typical.

The game progressed along the same note for a while – Slytherins and Gryffindors were trading off goals, keeping the game tied up. Harry noticed that Bletchley had blocked a number of shots by Katie Bell, who did indeed have a tendency to feint to the left hoop and then shoot right. He wondered how the Slytherins had obtained their information on the Gryffindor players... spying on their practices, perhaps?

Harry circled the field, scanning for a glint of gold... he caught sight of a shimmer! But no, it was someone’s wristwatch in the stands. Eric shot past him, searching for the snitch as well, and Harry noticed that his twin was riding atop a brand new Nimbus 2000. Harry realized with some jealousy and disgust that Lily and James had probably sent it to him.

“Spinnet in possession of the Quaffle – she dives with it, taking it low, tosses it up to Johnson – Johnson rushing toward the Slytherin goal posts – she shoots – but Slytherin Keeper Bletchley makes a skillful

save – he throws it out to Slytherin chaser Clyde Warrington, who rushes back toward the Gryffindor end of the field – and WHEW – one of the Weasley twins just barely misses being taken out by a Bludger from Slytherin beater Roger Bole, rather ugly bloke, that one...”

It looked as if the beaters’ plan was working to distract Fred and George Weasley from nailing the Slytherin chasers. For the last ten minutes, Roger Bole and Lyrian had been consistently pelting the redheaded twins.

“Johnson interrupted by Marcus Flint of Slytherin, who knocks the Quaffle out of her hands as she flies by – the Quaffle’s dropping slowly, good thing there are charms on it to keep it from going too fast – and Pucey catches it, speeding to Gryffindor Keeper Captain Oliver Wood – Pucey’s ripping toward the goalposts, looks to pass it back to Flint – wait a moment – was that the Snitch?”

A murmur ran through the crowd as Adrian Pucey dropped the Quaffle, too busy looking over his shoulder at the flash of gold that had passed his left ear.

Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived downward after the streak of gold. Eric was fast on his tail, catching up now because of his better broom. Neck and neck they hurtled toward the Snitch. All the Chasers seemed to have forgotten what they were supposed to be doing as they hung in midair to watch.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry noticed a flash of dark color, and suddenly WHAM, a sickening crunch, and Eric crumpled forward. Harry was torn – keep pursuing the Snitch or help his twin? – but he was saved from making that decision by the whistle that tore through the air.

“TIME OUT! INJURY!” Madam Hooch yelled, her voice magically amplified.

Harry stopped and watched as Eric lowered slowly to the ground. The Gryffindor boy’s head was bent forward, and Harry could see his chest rising and falling in painful breaths. Madam Hooch met him at

ground level. Everyone in the audience was standing, whispering anxiously while they watched Eric on the field.

“And it looks like new Gryffindor seeker Eric Potter has been hit rather badly in the back of the head by a bludger, sent by Lyrian Derrick of Slytherin, the dirty scum—”

Harry glanced upwards towards Lyrian, who was grinning broadly. Flint flew up next to Lyrian and whispered something to him. The two of them laughed, rather nastily, Harry thought, and then started gliding around in the air, bored.

“Did’ya like that one, Harry? Told you I’d watch out for your brother,” said Lyrian with satisfaction.

“Er... yeah, nice shot,” responded Harry uncertainly.

The time-out stretched for about ten minutes. After getting his wound checked by some healers, Eric finally got back onto his broom, looking a little worse for the wear, but okay. The crowd cheered in relief. The players resumed their positions, and the game started again.

It wasn’t long before something else odd began happening. Harry had been riding around the outskirts of the pitch when he noticed Eric acting strangely... or rather, it seemed that his new Nimbus was going haywire, vibrating like crazy and every once in a while bucking Eric wildly.

“Wait, what’s this? Something odd’s happening to Eric Potter’s broom!” Lee Jordan noticed, causing the whole crowd to look up at the young Gryffindor seeker.

A student couldn’t hoodwink a broom to act like that, Harry knew... there were so many protective charms on Quidditch supplies that it was nigh impossible to mess with them. Only powerful dark magic could be at play....

The broom gave an especially intense jolt and Eric slid off, grabbing on with just one hand. An audible gasp was heard from the crowd, even though they were fairly far away from the stands.

That was when Harry noticed it – the Snitch. It was flitting around innocently near Eric's broom, just above where Eric was gripping onto the thing for dear life. Harry bolted toward him, and Eric, while struggling, looked up to see his brother approaching.

"Harry," gasped Eric, flailing as the broom twitched again. The boy's hazel eyes were filled with terror.

Harry reached out a hand toward the Snitch, but then as he caught sight of Eric's face again, he knew that to Eric, it looked like Harry was reaching out to help him back onto his broom. The Gryffindor's flushed face was filled with hope and relief.

It practically broke Harry's heart to do what he had to do. "I'm so sorry, Eric," Harry whispered, and grasped the fluttering Snitch just above his brother's hand. Coincidentally, just as he held it up in his grasp, Eric's broom stopped acting strangely.

The crowd was silent in confusion and outrage. Suddenly a cheer erupted from the Slytherin section as they realized that their seeker had caught the Snitch.

"Uh, I guess... Harry Potter of Slytherin caught the Snitch, but the circumstances are a little sketchy. Slytherin wins, 220 – 80..." Lee Jordan said with more than a bit of confusion.

Eric was able to pull himself back onto his broom, and this time he simply hovered next to Harry for a moment, looking his brother in the eyes. Harry had to look away as he noticed Eric's eyes filling with tears.

"You're not my brother, Harry. You're not my twin. Who the hell are you, you coldhearted bastard! Look at me!" Eric screamed, his lightning-bolt scar visible on his forehead as the cold wind lifted his hair.

Harry looked back, jaw set. "You don't get it, Eric, you don't understand!"

"What?! What makes this okay? You'd rather me fall to my death than lose a stupid game, that's all I see," Eric snapped, traitorous tears escaping from his eyes. Harry absently noticed how the back of Eric's hair was coated with a bit of dried blood from his earlier injury.

"Eric... if I ever help you, the Slytherins will kill me – they'll make my life hell," explained Harry fiercely. "You have no idea how hard it is to be in Slytherin and come from a light family!"

"Why, Harry? Are you embarrassed? Do you want to go dark like all your little friends, because you're sure on the right path to!" spat Eric, furiously wiping tears away from his cheeks. "I have a tough road ahead of me in life and even if we weren't friends, I thought you'd always be at my back."

"I..." Harry began lamely, still holding the quivering Snitch in his fist. His throat began to feel thick with guilt. He should have helped Eric. What had he been thinking?

"Don't, Harry. I don't want to hear your Slytherin excuses and lies," Eric snarled. With that, he began his slow descent to the rest of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Before Harry had even gotten a chance to regain his composure, Lyrian Derrick floated up next to him.

"Fantastic, Harry! Couldn't have done it better, myself," he praised, beaming. He then caught sight of Harry's broken expression and his watery eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, Lyrian," Harry dismissed coldly, looking away and blinking rapidly.

"Was it about whatever that idiot said to you after you caught it?" Lyrian suggested, actually looking a little concerned.

Harry didn't feel like talking, so he just looked down and sniffed slightly.

“Don’t listen to him, you know better than that,” said Lyrian. He’s just a little kid, sore that he lost.”

“It’s only because of what happened to his broom...” muttered Harry. “He’s better than me, you know – he’s been training really hard since I beat him to the Remembrall a while back, and me winning then was a fluke anyway. Ugh. What was the problem with Eric’s broom today, anyway?”

“I think I know the jinx someone used,” said Lyrian, “Pretty wicked of them – I wonder who it was?” He paused, considering. “I have a few possible suspects, but I’ll ask around. With my connections, I can usually get to the bottom of these sorts of things.”

Lyrian winked, but Harry sighed, looking down at the field where the crowd was beginning to evacuate the fields.

“Look, Harry, don’t beat yourself up,” Lyrian offered. “Fuck them. It doesn’t matter how it happened, it just matters that we won.”

With that, the two of them dipped down and momentarily found themselves on the field. Harry was quickly surrounded by his Slytherin teammates as they all greeted him in glee. There were a lot of handshakes and cheers on Harry’s behalf, and burly Marcus Flint even gave Harry a hug, which was admittedly a little awkward.

Harry was just starting to feel a little better when some people standing at the end of the pitch caught his eye. They were just outside the Gryffindor locker room; two adults and one child in scarlet robes. The woman was short with long, dark red hair, and the man was tall, wearing glasses and with disheveled jet-black hair just like Harry’s own.

His parents, with Eric.

Lily enveloped Eric in a hug, and then let him follow his teammates into the locker room. She turned to say something to her husband, but he was busy watching the Slytherin team... watching Harry.

Like a moth drawn to the light that kills it, Harry found himself walking toward his parents. He couldn't help it. He knew that nothing good would come of this, but somewhere deep down, he wanted his parents to accept him. Maybe they wouldn't be too mad...?

"Hi Mum, hi Dad," he said quietly, delicate hope shining in his eyes. He felt like a child again, like when he was at home, always trying to please them.

They both looked at him with dead, flat expressions. Finally James opened his mouth. "Getting chummy with your Slytherin friends there, I see."

"They're not my friends, Dad," Harry replied, wanting to convince them that it was true. And it was. He had no friends, not real ones anyway. Just acquaintances who wanted something from him.

"Oh really?" James' temper flared. "Because it looks to me like you or one of your Slytherin mates jinxed my son, and risked his life, so you could beat him!"

"James," said Lily warningly, putting a hand on his arm. The man shrugged out of it, grabbed Harry by the wrist, and dragged him off the field. He took the young Slytherin boy behind the stands, out of sight from the main path to the box seats.

"You little bastard, Harry," said James scathingly. "I would say I expected better of you, but to be honest, that wouldn't be true. You were always a little off, and now your true colors are showing, eh? Green and silver. You cheating little snake."

James pushed him roughly, so that Harry stumbled and fell to the ground. Harry looked away, feeling almost as if he deserved this. He was supposed to have been a Gryffindor, damn it! Or a Hufflepuff, or a Ravenclaw – but he had been naïve, a stupid jealous child who simply was too weak to deal with a brother getting more attention, so foolish. And now look where he was – in Slytherin, with no friends and no morals. Harry hated himself; he was disgusted.

But simultaneously he felt that it just wasn't fair. Yeah, maybe life wasn't fair, but he was doing the best he could, and there was no one in this world who would accept that.

"James," said a voice from behind him. Lily had followed them, and she was now looking straight at her husband, not acknowledging Harry whatsoever. "Eric will be done changing soon. We should say goodbye to him and give him the gift that we brought for him."

"I suppose you're right," sighed James, anger diffused. He walked away with Lily, leaving their son on the ground alone. Although James had never done more than grab or shove Harry roughly, Harry still felt like a weak rag doll, unable to do anything back.

But worst of all was his mother. At least when James yelled at him or pushed him, Harry knew where he stood. But Lily just acted as if he didn't even exist... like he wasn't worth the time or effort to look at, or to talk to. It hurt Harry deeply, and against his will, tears started dripping from his eyes, slowly at first, and then with more intensity.

There was no way out. He was caged. He was stuck in a microcosm of Death Eater society, where although it was run by children, it seemed that the only options were either perfection or pain. Harry tried to be the perfect Slytherin, for them, so he could fit in and feel proud. But the further he looked for acceptance with the Slytherins, the worse his situation became with his family.

Blood shouldn't determine so much, Harry thought, mind on his family, and then he realized how true his statement was. Because of his blood, he was treated by the Slytherins as lesser and untrustworthy. Because of his blood, he felt a responsibility to people who were nothing like him – his so-called family. Because of blood, Lyrian had killed his own parents and Voldemort had murdered massive amounts of muggles and mudbloods.

Harry was just so confused. There was nobody there to tell him what to do, and no "right" path for him to follow...

Mwahaha. So - tell me what you think about Lyrian and that whole deal. I know that there are many stories out there where Harry is all



intent on getting revenge on his parents, and I know how absurd that can be. So please note that Harry didn't really think of that... Lyrian did, and then Lyrian manipulated Harry into agreeing. Even with that, Harry isn't entirely sure that that was what he wanted.

In fact, poor Harry at this time in his life is getting manipulated by everyone. :( I think that is probably one of the most realistic things about it; he's an eleven-year-old Slytherin trying to find his way amongst all these crafty, sneaky people, so of course he's going to get used and exploited for a while!

Warm, gooey cookies to my reviewers!

## Chapter 6: Mind Games

Albus Dumbledore was, admittedly, a little worried. He would have attended the Quidditch match if the Board of Governors hadn't scheduled a meeting for that very time. When he heard about the events of the game, though, he was quite unsettled.

Not only had someone jinxed Eric Potter's broom, almost resulting in the death of the Boy-Who-Lived, but Harry Potter hadn't made any move to help his twin, despite flying right next to him at his brother's moment of peril. This was concerning indeed.

In fact, Albus wasn't certain about a lot of things having to do with Harry Potter. When the boy had been missing from his common room during the troll incident, Albus had at first been suspicious but then dismissed his unrest as paranoia, since he was looking anywhere for a scapegoat. It would not do to blame an eleven-year-old boy for the appearance of a magical beast in the school, no matter how much he wanted someone to be at fault. The school governors were most displeased that the mystery remained unsolved, although Albus had offered a few possibilities.

When questioning the boy after the event, he had lightly touched the boy's mind with Legilimency, and with some surprise, had found a little bit of natural Occlumency. He didn't want to prod too deeply to make the boy more aware of the intrusion, though, so he settled on seeing faint images of Quirrell in Harry's thoughts. Since Quirrell had come into the office and spoken on behalf of Harry, the young Slytherin's story was legitimized. Still, something struck Dumbledore as a bit off.

Ever since that Halloween night when Eric Potter had been marked with the lightning-bolt scar, fulfilling part of the prophecy, Albus had been concerned about Lily and James parenting the two boys correctly. He knew that Eric would need so much more love and care than a normal child if he was to learn to love the wizarding world and the light enough to lead it into victory. So, Albus had, well... pushed things along a bit. He'd cast an old enchantment on James and Lily, powerful but almost undetectable. The spell urged them to use some of the caring they would have directed at Harry and put it all towards

Eric. But it seemed as if those subtle urgings had grown out of hand, and perhaps they had not treated Harry as decently as Albus had hoped. Was that why the boy was being such a problem now?

Albus stroked his long beard pensively, and then decided to stop ruminating about the past. He had made decisions, and he could not go back on them. Besides, this new situation was more pressing.

He knew that ultimately he was going to have to train Eric Potter to follow in his footsteps and take charge, to be the new leader of the light. But having a twin brother that seemed to be going as dark as Eric was light... well, that was unexpected.

He'd have to watch out for any more suspicious activity from the boy as the year progressed. Although Albus had been shocked when Harry was sorted into Slytherin, he figured it must have been because the boy had a desire to become as great as Eric – that he had the ambition to succeed. But now it seemed that Harry's ambition was misplaced, and instead, he was heading down the traditional path of Slytherin students who practiced the dark arts.

Albus would have to keep an eye out for him. Once, he had let a brilliant young Slytherin go too far unchecked, and he wasn't about to let that happen again.

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Harry didn't quite know how to go about spying on Eric. He owed it to Quirrell, he knew, but he wondered just how detailed a report the Defense teacher had in mind. Well, Harry said he would fulfill the terms to the best of his ability, so it was time to get serious.

A few days had passed since the Gryffindor versus Slytherin Quidditch match, and it seemed that Harry had gained some respect among the Slytherins. Most of it, he knew, was due to the galling way he had ignored his Gryffindor brother in favor of catching the Snitch for a Slytherin win. Harry also suspected that some of that might have been because of Lyrian's influence, since he had heard rumors of the older boy speaking out in favor of him.

While the Slytherins remained as suspicious and crafty as ever, Harry did notice that the first year boys seemed a little less cold toward him. At the beginning of the year they would avoid him for the most part, obviously hating that they had to share a room with a boy from such a light family. Now they treated him as just another normal Slytherin kid they had to share a dorm with – no more, and no less. Harry rather liked it that way, and was glad that his stunt had accomplished something good.

On the other hand, the rest of the school was definitely more hostile. Some of the Ravenclaws with Slytherin siblings were sympathetic, but the other Ravenclaws, the Hufflepuffs, and especially the Gryffindors thought that Harry was a callous, compassionless wretch. When Harry would walk in the halls, more often than not if he passed someone, they would glare at him or look away, disgusted.

Harry did his best not to care. From time to time, however, it felt a little unbearable and he would shut himself up in the Slytherin common room to read books like the one he had snuck from Flourish and Blott's in the summer. Other times he'd retreat to the library and work diligently on schoolwork, trying to go above and beyond the expectations of the teachers. He had the best grades in the class, tailed closely by Hermione Granger, and wanted to keep it that way.

Ever since the troll incident, he'd noticed that Hermione had begun to hang around Eric and Ron. Harry acknowledged that the two did save her from the troll, but he was surprised that they'd subsequently become friends. In many ways, she was the opposite of the two boys; she was studious, rule-abiding, and serious.

Eric was no fool, though, and he was hardly far behind Hermione in the caliber of his schoolwork. Harry supposed that by befriending Hermione, he could easily keep up with her and use her as a way to get homework done faster, so he'd have more time to play Exploding Snap or Quidditch.

Or perhaps that was just the Slytherin in Harry thinking – always seeing a relationship or friendship as a means and not an ends; for the ways it could be used, not for the inherent value.

As luck would have it, Harry didn't have to work too hard to obtain his first report for Quirrell. Instead, the opportunity came right to him as he was studying in the library one day, looking up more information about Devil's Snare for herbology.

Apparently it was a very nasty plant, composed of stringy vines that ensnared anyone who was unfortunate enough to touch them. The harder a person struggled against Devil's Snare, the faster and tighter it bound them – and its only weaknesses were heat and extreme light.

Harry glanced up from his reading to see a newcomer to the library. It was Hermione Granger, the know-it-all Gryffindor herself. A plan quickly unfolded in Harry's mind; this was his chance to get information on Eric.

The bushy-haired girl made a beeline for the charms section and started scanning the books on the shelf nearest to her, brow furrowed in concentration. She stood up on the balls of her feet, trying to see the titles of the books lining one of the upper shelves. Harry stood up from the table where he was watching her, and strode over to the Gryffindor girl.

"Need help getting one of those?" he asked politely, enjoying how he stood a few inches taller than her. He was shorter than Eric by a bit (and on the smaller side of many of the male students) so it was gratifying to at least stand taller than some of the girls.

She jumped slightly and turned toward him. When she recognized him, her eyes narrowed. "Not from you," she snapped.

"So rude, Miss Granger; I thought you were better mannered than that," said Harry, smiling.

"Frankly, I don't think I need to be polite to people who antagonize and hurt my friends," she responded, not looking at him. Instead, her attention was back up at the bookshelf, where she was trying to reach a book in vain.

"Here," offered Harry, stretching up for it. He handed to her, and she took it, muttering a quiet, "Thanks."

“My pleasure,” said Harry suavely. He was enjoying this... it was rather fun to act the part, to hold all the cards, and to try to get them into fall into place. If he said the right things, he could get the information he needed with her none the wiser.

She moved to an empty table, setting the book on its surface and placing her bag on the floor next to a chair. Harry followed her and slid into the seat across from her.

“What are you doing here, Potter?” she said impatiently. He simply sat opposite her casually, not responding. She tried again. “Go away, I’m trying to study.”

“And I won’t bother you,” he responded happily. “Please, go right ahead.”

She huffed and then opened the book, determined to ignore him. He was fine with that; he’d definitely been ignored before.

While she began to study her book, he in turn studied her just as intently. She wasn’t as ugly as he had thought she was – in fact, if one ignored her unruly hair, she was actually a little pretty, in a plain way. But Harry wasn’t interested in a goody-two-shoes Gryffindor girl. Not in the least. He did, however, think he could use compliments on her looks to his advantage.

After a full ten minutes of her reading the book and him staring at her, she finally snapped.

“Look, I can’t get a thing done with you sitting there watching me the entire time,” she said crossly, her honey-brown eyes fierce.

“Well, you do have rather nice features,” he replied matter-of-factly. His green eyes were playful. “Is it such a crime to look at them?”

She blushed deeply, opened her mouth, and then closed it again, having found no response. Finally she said, “Potter, I don’t think it’s really appropriate for you to be in here talking to me. Your brother is

one of my best friends, and I'm loyal to him before anyone. So don't try anything with me, you hear?"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," said Harry, his expression taken aback. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean anything by it. Why are you and Eric such good friends, anyway? Seemed to me that a couple of months ago, he never even talked to you."

She sighed. "Yeah, well, after the whole troll thing, with Eric and Ron coming to help me... I guess I just forgave their faults a little more and they did the same with me."

"So they didn't just make friends with you so you'd do their homework?" Harry suggested.

"No! Of course not," Hermione denied, scandalized. "I'd never lower myself to making so-called friends just for that."

"But Eric's got pretty good grades – third or fourth in the class. He's not actually that smart, is he?" Harry laughed.

"Yes he actually is smart," Hermione defended, "Apparently you're a pretty terrible twin if you didn't know that. Although I guess I shouldn't be surprised; you're almost downright evil."

Harry refused to be derailed from his original plan. "So he doesn't get tutored to keep up the kind of grades he has?"

"No, not in the subjects we're tested on in school. Dumbledore's just started giving him a bit of instruction in charisma and how to be a leader, but for all of our core subjects Eric's doing everything on his own," she responded primly. "Believe it or not, he's a brilliant guy."

Hah! She'd played right into his hands perfectly. Harry fought to keep from smiling. "Good for him, I guess. Never thought he had it in him to study."

"Well, he doesn't actually do a ton of studying," Hermione admitted, her voice slightly sulky. "He just understands concepts quickly, and has a really good memory."

“So that’s why he’s not here with you tonight?”

“Yeah,” she said somewhat bitterly. Harry suspected she was jealous of the way Eric didn’t have to work hard for his grades.

“Don’t worry, I have to work for my grades, too,” he responded with a knowing smile. It was partially true. Although he had the same ability as Eric to absorb material quickly, he often did a lot of extra work on his own.

She smiled back tentatively, and then seemed to realize who Harry was again, and began to frown. “Look, I don’t know what you’re playing at, but last time I checked, I didn’t think Slytherins liked to make idle chitchat with Gryffindors.”

“I’m bored, what can I say?” said Harry easily. “And there’s practically no one in here, so it’s not like anyone else will care.”

“I guess. But I still don’t trust you. I can’t believe what you did to Eric at the match,” she hissed, leaning forward.

Harry sighed. “I’m sorry about that, I really am. But I don’t expect you to understand my reasons and I’d rather not talk about it. So I’ll see you around, Granger.”

He stood up and gathered his belongings. “Oh and by the way, that charm that you’re researching has an alternate incantation. I found it interesting; you might, too.”

With that he made his way out of the library, ignoring her slightly surprised reaction. That had gone perfectly. He now had a report for Quirrell.

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The next morning, Harry rose bright and early. Sure enough, when he wandered up to the Great Hall for breakfast, the enchanted ceiling revealed that the first snow of the season had arrived. Harry was feeling decidedly jolly until he passed a couple of older Gryffindor



boys who glared at him angrily on their way back from the Great Hall. Still sore about the Quidditch match, Harry thought with exasperation.

He sat down to breakfast, helping himself to some sausages, and scanned the hall. Students were trickling in slowly for the morning meal, and gazing up at the enchanted ceiling in wonder, with its beautiful image of snow falling softly upon the school.

Finishing up his sausages and pumpkin juice quickly, he decided to get to Quirrell's office as quickly as possible. He knew that the Defense professor was a very early riser, so there would be no way that he could be sleeping in. Harry didn't want to keep him waiting too long for the information, since breaking a life debt had some pretty terrible repercussions.

Before long he was standing just outside the door to Quirrell's office on the fourth floor. He rapped on the door twice, and then stood back. After some shuffling from within and the click of locks being undone, Quirrell opened the door. He had his turban on, as usual, and his demeanor was relaxed and fresh.

"Ah, Potter," he greeted, "Come in, come in."

The young professor ushered Harry in and locked the door behind him. Harry glanced around the room. It was relatively undecorated, with a desk and chair to one side and then a pair of green armchairs at the other end. The walls were bare and a black large trunk was tucked into one of the corners.

"Make yourself comfortable, now, go ahead and sit down," Quirrell offered with a twitchy smile. Harry complied and settled on one of the green armchairs, which was rather firm.

"So, what news do you have for me about your brother?" the man asked, relaxing into the other armchair.

"I discovered that he's just recently started taking lessons from Professor Dumbledore," Harry replied, "But they're just on charisma and leadership."

"I see," Quirrell commented pensively. "Good work, Potter, that's useful information."

"Sir... may I ask why? It's not as if Eric's learning magic or anything."

"Oh, Mr. Potter," Quirrell laughed, "I doubt that very much indeed. There are many uses for magic in leadership. If one puts a bit of magic into his words, people will listen more, or the voice will be louder. That sort of thing."

"I didn't know," said Harry, wishing he was a bit more educated.

"Few do, so I wouldn't be too embarrassed. Leadership magic is subtle but, for a powerful witch or wizard, can be an indispensable tool," informed Quirrell absently. He was looking at a blank point on the wall, apparently deep in thought.

"Professor?" he tried tentatively.

"Yes, Potter?" Quirrell replied, breaking out of thought to regard Harry. There was something rather malicious about the man's brown eyes, but Harry couldn't quite tell what.

"I was reading, the other day, about a branch of magic called Legilimency," he began. "And I realized that if anyone knows it, they'll be able to see into my head and find the memory of the three-headed dog... and you not stuttering and everything."

It had indeed been worrying him ever since he'd discovered a mention of it in a library book. He didn't want to be forced to break part of the terms of the life debt if someone found out about the incident.

"Ah," Quirrell said shortly. "Yes, I hadn't considered that.... Well, I will have to teach you Occlumency, then. Your uses as an informant for your brother far outweigh the cost of teaching you."

"Occlumency is the opposite of Legilimency, right?" Harry asked, trying to recall what the textbook said.

“Correct,” Quirrell said, pulling his wand out of a holster at one sleeve. “It is the art of defending one’s mind against mental attacks, and you’re quite fortunate that I’m trained in the art. Let’s see how you fare if I use Legilimency on you now... then I’ll see where your problems and faults are, and set you an assignment.”

“Er... okay sir,” agreed Harry, standing up. He hadn’t expected Quirrell to know Occlumency and Legilimency, but with more thought, he supposed it made sense; the man was obviously hiding some pretty serious secrets if he was so intent on acting the part of the stuttering, cowardly professor.

“Ready?” Quirrell asked, his wand out and ready. Harry nodded a little nervously. “Legilimens!”

Harry’s mind suddenly felt bombarded by a pushing force – it was strong, but pointed, almost like a worm, wriggling forcefully into layers of his subconscious. By instinct Harry felt a tentative wall spring up in his mind, trying to seal it from intruders, but it hardly did a thing... it only slowed Quirrell for the faintest second. Memories began to race through his mind; Eric getting his first levitating broom while Harry watched enviously; Lily telling stories to Eric by the hearth; looking at Eric’s terror-filled face as he hung from his broomstick...

Harry wondered if Quirrell was searching for memories on Eric. It couldn’t be coincidence that every recollection involved his Gryffindor twin.

Finally the spell ended, and Harry sank to the ground, feeling wobbly. “Surprising, Potter,” Quirrell remarked. “You have a bit of natural Occlumency.”

“I do?” said Harry faintly, pushing himself up to sit on the green armchair again. His head was pounding dully.

“Yes. It’s rare, but not unheard of. Most often, those with natural potential are never instructed, so their talents go to waste,” said Quirrell, twirling his wand in his hand idly. It was still so odd to see him so relaxed and in control, rather than the uptight, fearful professor that Harry was accustomed to.

"But you just ripped through my mind anyway," protested Harry. "I couldn't do much."

"Ah, but you could do something. That you were able to construct a wall at all is the key. Additionally, I used the spoken incantation for Legilimency, and it is far more powerful than eye-contact Legilimency," explained Quirrell. "That, and I have... unusual skill as a Legilimens."

Quirrell's brown eyes glinted dangerously, and Harry could have sworn he saw a flash of red. Harry suddenly felt very on edge.

"Shall we go again, Potter?" suggested Quirrell, straightening his turban and raising his wand.

Harry felt a little shaky still, but he was determined to look strong for his professor. "I'm ready."

No sooner had he spoken the words than Quirrell had cried, "Legilimens!" again.

Harry sensed the wall around his thoughts spring up again faster this time, since he was expecting it more. Still, it only slowed Quirrell for a few seconds before crumbling and allowing him entrance.

James giving Eric a bone-crushing hug; Eric as a toddler, hogging all the crayons; Eric in Ollivander's wand shop, grabbing his new wand with glee; Eric as a ten-year-old getting tutored by Lily in defense against the dark arts theory, although he didn't seem to be listening very intently... Finally, the images ceased and Harry found himself on the floor again, this with sharp pains shooting through his brain every so often.

His pain made him angry. What the fuck was with Quirrell's obsession with Eric?

"Defense against the dark arts training, eh?" said Quirrell pensively. "They would get him started on that early, although it hasn't done him

much good in my class so far this year... only learning about dark beasts..."

Harry only half-listened to Quirrell's mutterings. He was more concerned with the piercing stabs tearing through his head. Feeling a little sick, he looked down to the ground and tried to breathe slowly and deliberately.

"Well, Potter, I have a book on the subject that may help you to learn Occlumency, but be forewarned that it is not an easy art to master, especially for one so young," Quirrell warned, lending Harry a hand to pull him off his position on the floor. "Until you've progressed further, though, I'd suggest avoiding eye contact with Dumbledore and perhaps Snape. I have my suspicions about that potions professor..."

"They know Legilimency too, then?" said Harry weakly, putting a hand to his head.

"Yes," Quirrell affirmed with a crooked half-smile, "Dumbledore does certainly, and Snape is a possibility."

Harry felt a little violated, remembering the sudden headache that he had gotten when he was in Snape's office, accepting his punishment after the flying fiasco.

"Now you'd best be off, I have some class preparation to do. Read the first couple chapters of that book before you see me next," said Quirrell, striding to the door where he unlocked it and then ushered Harry out. "I look forward to your next report."

"Er... yes, professor."

With that, the young man closed the door and Harry heard the distinct sound of locks clicking back into place. Professor Quirinus Quirrell was a strange man, Harry decided. He seemed so harmless when he was in public, but behind closed doors, he was a rather scheming and creepy character.

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It was a chilly Saturday afternoon in the beginning of December when Lyrian finally contacted Harry about their first meeting. The message came with the owl post, but Harry was surprised when a large black owl swooped down to him and landed primly on his shoulder. Harry hadn't gotten even one piece of mail since he'd started at Hogwarts, so it was quite an event indeed.

After offering the owl a scrap of roast beef off of his sandwich (the proud bird promptly refused it), Harry shrugged and detached the letter from its leg.

Harry,

I've found a bit of time to begin your training, so to speak. Meet me at six o' clock at the seventh floor corridor on the west side of the castle, by the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy.

Bring nothing but your wand.

Lyrian

"Got some mail there, Potter?" Sonia Moon's soft voice questioned from the other side of the table. She was sitting next to Millicent Bulstrode, who looked up from her meal with interest at Sonia's pronouncement.

"Not from Mummy and Daddy, I'm sure," Millicent added cruelly.

"None of your business," responded Harry evenly. He folded the letter and tucked it into the pocket of his robes.

"It wouldn't be, but I know whose owl that is. That's Lyrian Derrick's owl," said Sonia, her face blank but her yellow-green eyes curious.

"What could someone as notable as him want with a nobody like you?" Millicent barked. She really was quite ugly, with a large, pimply face and watery eyes.

"Have you two got nothing better to do than harass me about a letter?" Harry snapped, rising from the table and turning to leave.

“Apparently not,” Sonia added, unstirred.

“I’m taking his sandwich, then,” he heard Millicent say as he walked away.

Harry sighed, frustrated, as he made his way back to the Slytherin common room. Sometimes the nosiness of the Slytherins was too much, especially for amateurs like the first-years. They thought they were being oh-so-cool and sneaky by prying into everyone’s business, but they hadn’t yet realized that to be a true Slytherin you had to do it undetected, without being so bloody obvious.

Upon reaching the common room, Harry mumbled the password and was allowed entrance. The place was relatively busy, as far as the Slytherin common room was concerned. Two seventh years were engrossed in a game of wizard’s chess in one corner, while in the middle a crowd of people were lounging about, chatting idly. Theodore Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and Pansy Parkinson were sitting together by the fireplace, watching Draco as he demonstrated some spell or another.

Harry paid them no heed and continued up to the first-year boys’ dormitory to relax and wait out the few hours before he was to meet Lyrian. He pulled out a stack of textbooks from under his bed and flipped through them, bored. *Olde and Forgotten Bewitchments and Charmes*, *Basic Hexes for the Busy and Vexed*, and *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts* were the first three. Harry had been especially interested in reading that last one, because it was the one that discussed Eric’s defeat of Voldemort... and made no mention of Harry at all.

He flipped through it some more as it detailed the rise of Grindelwald, the wizard accomplice of Adolf Hitler in the muggle World War II. It was quite interesting, actually, how the reign of the wizarding dark lord had paralleled with similar events in muggle society. The book easily held Harry’s attention for a couple of hours while he learned about the balance of dark and light magic over the years. He did, however, wish the book had said something about how Grindelwald had become what he was, rather than just saying that he appeared

on the scene around so-and-so year. What did it take to create a dark lord? For that matter, how did Voldemort come to be what he was?

Before he knew it, Harry looked at his watch and realized he had fifteen minutes to get to the seventh floor. He quickly stashed the books back under his bed, grabbed his wand off the nightstand, and rushed out of the Slytherin dungeons. As he was essentially underground, it would take a while to get up so high in the school.

Finally he arrived at the seventh floor, west wing, breathing heavily. He stopped to catch his breath and then wandered through the corridor, looking for a particular tapestry. After a minute or so he caught sight of the tapestry depicting a strangely dressed wizard attempting to train trolls for the ballet. It was actually quite laughable, and while he was busy inspecting the ludicrous scene, a voice spoke from behind him.

"Hello, Harry," said Lyrian, causing Harry to jump, startled. He whipped around to face the fifth-year.

"Oh, hey Lyrian," replied Harry, feeling especially short next to the much taller kid. Lyrian towered at around six feet tall, while Harry stood markedly under him at four foot ten. He felt like his stature gave a much more childish impression than he would have wanted, but at eleven years old, he knew there was still plenty of time to grow.

"Have you ever heard of the Room of Requirement?" the older boy asked, beginning to pace back and forth in front of the tapestry. "I don't expect you have, but perhaps."

"Er... no, I haven't heard of it," said Harry truthfully. "What is it?"

Lyrian continued to walk back and forth, almost purposefully. The action looked odd; Lyrian wasn't usually the type to fidget, so it seemed awkward for him. "The Room of Requirement," Lyrian began, turning one last time, "is right here."

At his words, a door materialized in the wall opposite the tapestry. Harry blinked as Lyrian turned the handle and ushered him inside.



Inside was a perfectly equipped practice room. A bookshelf stood in one corner while various dummies and targets were placed at another side of the room. Most of the place, however, was taken up by a large clearing marked by a circle.

“How...?” began Harry, stunned. How could a room like this just be sitting in Hogwarts?

“This room appears when someone passes it enough times in real need of something. So if I pace outside of here thinking that I need a place to train you, it fulfills my wish,” Lyrian explained, blue eyes gleaming.

“How did you know about it?” asked Harry, still dumbfounded.

Lyrian gave him a look of pure elitist exasperation. “Come now, Harry, must you really ask that of me? Since last year I’ve been essentially running Slytherin house. Sure, some of the seventh years don’t respect me as much as the rest of them, purely because I’m younger – but if I want to know something, I will hear about it. It’s not even a question.”

Harry nodded mutely. He walked around the perimeter of the room and glanced at the titles of the books on the shelf. Jinxes for the Jinxed, The Unforgiveables Explained, Magick Moste Evile, and The Vengeance Compendium were just a few of the titles he read before turning away. He gulped. This was real... he’d be getting into some pretty serious dark magic if he stuck with these lessons.

“So, Harry,” Lyrian addressed him, “I thought we might begin with some basic dark curses, jinxes, and hexes. These aren’t the shitty light curses... what an oxymoron, by the way... that you get taught by professors. These are the real deal.”

Lyrian levitated a dummy to the center of the room, where he charmed it to stay standing upright. “This will probably be a good first one,” he said, smirking. He abruptly raised his wand and suddenly moved his wrist in a snappy slashing motion to the right. “Spiculum!”

Right where the dummy's heart would be, a series of small, thin cuts appeared. They looked very little and harmless, but as Harry watched, a blood-like substance started to leak out of them, first slowly, and then faster, until it started to drip down the dummy's chest. Harry's own heart began to beat faster... he was going to learn how to do that to somebody.

"Isn't it beautiful, Harry?" Lyrian smiled genuinely. He glanced over to Harry and his eyes were aglow, his face flushed with pleasure. It was more than a little unsettling. "Here, you try."

Harry moved to the center of the clearing, grasping his wand tightly.

"It's a variation on a basic slicing hex that's a bit more insidious... the target doesn't feel a ton of pain at first, but it creates multiple leaks in capillaries that start to seep blood slowly at first and then at an alarming rate. If left untreated and hit in the right spot, the target can easily die of blood loss."

Lyrian circled around him as he spoke, like a vulture circling its prey.

"The incantation, as you heard, is 'spiculum'. The emphasis is on the first syllable, and make sure to give that 'C' in there a nice clean, hard sound before continuing on to the rest of the word. But the most important part of casting a dark spell is the intent and purpose. You have to want it, Harry. You have to feel with every fiber of your being that your target deserves the pain, and you need to love inflicting it," Lyrian spoke passionately, his eyes boring into Harry's. "Summon your hate and your love for hurting others. It feels so good to be angry, Harry – don't hold back."

That was a lot to ask, in Harry's opinion. How was he supposed to become angry, just like that?

"Spiculum!" he tried, slashing his wand in the same way that Lyrian had done. The dummy simply gave a little twitch and then settled back again.

“You’ve got the casting part down well, but you still need the intent,” Lyrian said, shaking his head. “Think about your brother. Think about your parents. Remember how much they need to fucking die.”

Harry stilled his nervousness in favor of thinking about Eric. The memories that Quirrell had brought to the surface during their Legilimency session came rushing back – Harry standing to the side while Sirius brought Eric the finest toys, Lily taking the boys out for ice cream and forgetting to buy Harry one, James yelling in the wandcrafter’s shop that Harry was nothing special...

The feeling of injustice began to build in him, first in a righteous way, but then his thoughts turned much darker. He wanted to make them pay for all those times he had been shunted to the side, unloved, and treated coldly by everyone he tried to trust. They deserved it. They deserved to feel pain!

“Spiculum!” shouted Harry, breath heaving, as all of his anger built to a peak.

The signature crisscross slices appeared on the dummy’s lower chest, but Harry hardly paid attention to it. He was more concerned with the rising wave of pleasure within him, leaving him feel tingly and alive.

His breathing was quick and shallow as he reveled in the sudden ecstasy that had rippled throughout his body. It slowly ebbed away, but Harry itched to cast the spell again just to feel that blissful sensation...

Harry looked up at the dummy, which had liquid flowing slowly down its chest onto the floor. It dripped slowly and deliberately, and when Harry turned to face Lyrian, all he could do was smile.

Squee. I love dark Harry. NOTE: So yeah, Harry's going dark, but he's going to be a good person at heart... most of the time. While he may head down the wrong path for a while, he's capable of turning back... ;)

Oh, and before everyone goes crazy, there will not be a Harry/Hermione pairing (or for that matter, Harry/Ginny). Yes, Harry

noticed in this chapter that Hermione isn't as ugly as he thought she was, but he ended up just using that to get her a little off balance so she'd talk to him and give away info.

And DunDUnDUN finally there's a bit of Dumbledore manipulation - and he's part of the reason behind why Lily and James are so aloof and cold to Harry! Meddling old coot, I tell you. ;D

Tell me what you think! Review review review!

## Chapter 7: Connections

Harry wasn't looking forward to Christmas... not at all. It hadn't traditionally been a great holiday for him, anyway. Eric would always get tons of toys and Harry would receive maybe two or three gifts – and they'd be very mediocre presents compared to the ones his brother got.

And then of course there was the problem of going home to his parents. That was an issue. He wasn't sure how he'd act around them anymore, or how they'd treat him. Would they ignore him like before? Would they hate him even more intensely? Would he, Harry, act out against them? Harry didn't know, and he wasn't too keen on finding out.

So when Dumbledore made the announcement that those students who wanted to stay at Hogwarts over the break could sign up to do so, Harry jumped at the chance. His name was one of the first on the list posted on the Slytherin common room notice board. Lyrian also signed on, of course (he obviously didn't have any parents to go home to), and for some reason Blaise Zabini had his name on the list, too.

By the end of the week when Harry browsed through the names listed again, it seemed that only a few in Slytherin would be staying over the holiday. He supposed that as the children of the pureblood elite, many had parents who were eagerly awaiting their return.

Soon the Hogwarts Express was due to leave with the children in a couple of days, and Harry supposed he should have expected it when one day after lunch Eric approached him at the Slytherin table.

"I need to talk to you," he said, pointedly not looking at the Slytherin students who were staring his way. Pansy Parkinson was openly scowling at him.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Oh really?"

Eric regarded him grumpily. "Yes – now, please."

“Go right ahead,” said Harry pertly. The other Slytherins sitting around him snickered.

“In private, Harry,” Eric snapped.

“Fine,” Harry replied. He pushed away his plate and got up, feeling the eyes of the Slytherins on his back as he walked away with his brother. Eric led him out of the Great Hall and into an empty classroom on the same floor.

“Why aren’t you coming home for Christmas?” Eric began after a moment. He hoisted himself up to sit on a desk, but Harry remained standing, arms crossed and head tilted to the side.

“I had the impression that it would be better for all of us if I stayed away from you, Mum, and Dad,” Harry explained. Eric sighed and ruffled his reddish-brown hair.

“Look... Harry... we don’t get along. I don’t like you or the person you’re becoming. I hate that you’re my brother, that you’re my twin,” said Eric flatly. “But if there’s any chance of you coming back to our side—”

“—I wasn’t aware I’d chosen a side—”

“—then now is the time. Come back for Christmas, Harry, before it’s too late and you’re more Slytherin and dark than ever.”

Harry was dumbfounded. Eric, acting mature? Eric, being logical? When they were kids Eric was always more interested in being egotistical and acting on whims. It looked as if his twin had really grown up this year. Harry wondered if Dumbledore’s lessons on leadership were part of the reason.

“I...” Harry started, but then he realized he didn’t know what he was going to say. He didn’t really want to come home.

“You’ve done some pretty disgusting things this year, both to me and just in general. Don’t get me wrong; I still hate you. I hate you so much, but I’m so tired of being angry at you! I’d rather not have you

as an enemy all the time. Hermione made me see some sense... that if I had any chance to make a difference, that I'd have to act now. I'll talk to Mum and Dad for you when we go home. What do you say?" Eric's hazel eyes bored into him with an intensity that Harry had never seen before.

Harry felt sick. His bratty brother had never been this good of a person, and it made him feel almost dirty to witness Eric acting so justly. Eric really would be capable of leading the light against Voldemort; Harry could now see that very clearly.

He looked down at the ground and rubbed his temples, as a rush of guilt ran through him. Family bonds were stronger than anything... right?

"Okay," Harry said softly, trying to keep the torment out of his voice. "I'll come home."

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Harry looked idly out the compartment window in the Hogwarts Express as snow whipped through the air, riding upon furious currents of wind. Sonia Moon and Theodore Nott were sharing a compartment with him, but they were hardly an exciting bunch.

At first they had talked a little but then the discussion had died down, and now the area was silent as Sonia pulled out a book and Nott leaned against the side of the compartment, dozing. Harry just shrugged and gazed out the window, watching the wintry countryside as the train chugged along.

His mind still felt a little sore from a meeting with Quirrell, which had occurred yesterday. He had exchanged a bit of information about Eric, and then Quirrell had proceeded to give him an Occlumency lesson. Harry hadn't managed much more of a defense against the Legilimens, but perhaps he had held Quirrell off for a few more seconds. It hardly seemed like progress at all to Harry, but Quirrell insisted that a few years ago he had experienced a breakthrough in his Legilimency ability and was now much harder to fend off than most.

That seemed a little sketchy to Harry, but how was he to know what was right? He was a neophyte to the art and wouldn't be able to tell what was normal and what was unusual.

He thought back to his session with Lyrian not long ago and smiled a little anxiously. Casting dark spells had felt so amazing – so powerful and pleasurable at the same time. But it made him afraid of himself... how he had so easily been seduced by the sensation that he wanted to cast it again and again. The feeling had since faded, but Harry knew it wouldn't be gone forever. He remembered a passage in *Born from Darkness: The Nature of Dark Magic* that had warned about the effect.

Dark magic can be extremely addictive, although some people are more likely to have the addiction than others, much like a genetic susceptibility. People can be especially prone if they start casting dark spells at a young age, for a child's mind is still growing and thus less resistant to magical coercion than the mind of an adult.

Harry shuddered, concerned and more than a little fed up with himself. How the hell had he gotten into this mess?

He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he hadn't even noticed that the train was slowing until it finally came to a stop at King's Cross station. He poked Nott awake and then exited the compartment, waiting until most of the train had emptied before he disembarked. He was in no rush, after all.

When he emerged onto the platform, he found Eric quickly. Perhaps it was a twin thing, but he often had a sense of where his brother was. It also could be because, often, Eric had a larger-than-usual crowd of friends surrounding him at most times.

Within the throng of students were his parents and Eric, standing together. Harry paced around the outskirts of the crowd until it thinned out a bit, and then he decided it was about a good of time as any to go make himself known. With a sigh he turned and strode toward his family.



“Hello Mum, Dad,” he said quietly. James glanced at him and nodded curtly, then quickly looked back to Eric, who was telling him a story. Lily’s eyes flicked to him and she, too, made a noncommittal noise and then turned to her other son.

Harry was satisfied with that; at least they weren’t angry at him.

“... and then Ron told me that Charlie is off in Romania studying dragons! I can’t wait to take Care of Magical Creatures in third year, though I bet we won’t get to be around anything really good ‘till sixth or seventh year,” Eric was saying, his face light and smiling. “Who’s the teacher for that class, anyway?”

“When we were in school it was Professor Kettleburn, though I imagine that he’s getting rather old these days,” responded Lily, her beautiful face thoughtful.

“Yeah, not to mention that I heard he’s gotten some rather nasty injuries in the past few years. Word is that he’s going to retire soon to spend some time with his remaining limbs,” laughed James. “But maybe you’ll get him before he decides to quit. I’m not sure, son.”

Eric grinned and waved goodbye to a few people as they exited King’s Cross. They went to one of the special portkey points at King’s Cross that had a destination near Godric’s Hollow, and all put a hand on an old newspaper to activate the transportation. Before long, when the time struck the hour, Harry felt the familiar sensation of being whipped through space and then plopped out at another end. Harry landed gracefully, having used a portkey rather often in his life.

The family walked ahead of Harry, talking and laughing. Harry felt extra-aware of his presence – like an outsider that was looking into something private. It was a feeling he had often had when he was younger, and not at school, so he had forgotten how nice it was to be alone and not care! He wrapped his Slytherin scarf around his neck further; it was still cold and snowy, though less windy than earlier.

Just when they were reaching the Potter residence, Eric seemed to remember Harry. He glanced back at his twin and waited for Harry to

catch up. Once Harry was standing next to him, inwardly he scowled. Eric was a full two inches taller than him now – how unfair!

“Mum, Dad?” Eric said, catching the adults’ attention right away.

“Yes, Eric?” Lily responded. She had been approaching their front door, but she turned and listened patiently to her precious son.

“Could I talk to you once we get inside? It’s important,” said Eric. He glanced meaningfully at Harry and Harry knew that his brother was intending to talk to Lily and James about him.

“Of course, sweetie,” she replied, smiling curiously. James regarded his son proudly; Harry wasn’t the only one that could see that the boy had matured.

Harry followed his parents and brother inside and watched as Eric pulled Lily and James into a room to speak with them about the Slytherin boy. Harry’s stomach felt tight. He dared himself to hope that they might be different toward him after this.

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Lily’s and James’ efforts to change were kind of pathetic, Harry decided quickly. It was already Christmas morning and Harry had hardly noticed a difference in their behavior. Granted, they said and did nothing against him, and after his being sorted into Slytherin Harry supposed that took a fair amount of effort for them, but they didn’t do much else. Once, James had tried to make conversation with Harry about his house at Hogwarts, but the moment Harry mentioned Snape being head of house, his father had clammed up. Harry could tell he was trying hard not to say something vicious about the man.

Harry woke early on Christmas morning – he always had, even when he had much fewer presents than Eric under the tree, year after year. Every once in a while he’d get something nice, and he’d covet it more than Eric would for any of his nice gifts.

The pale light of dawn filled the house through the open windows in the hall as Harry exited his small bedroom. Remus and Sirius had arrived late last night to spend Christmas with the Potters and both were sleeping in a guest room on the first floor, so Harry had to be quiet when he went downstairs to make himself a cup of cocoa.

He must have been louder than he thought, though, because a few minutes after Harry had entered the kitchen, Remus came in, appearing disheveled as usual.

"Oh, sorry, I was trying to be quiet," mumbled Harry. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"Not to worry; it's not your fault," said Remus kindly. "Werewolf senses, you know. Much more acute than average hearing."

"Ah yes," acknowledged Harry, "I remember now. It's too bad the Ministry doesn't allow werewolves to be Aurors – extra sharp senses could be dead useful."

"Tell me about it," agreed Remus, sliding onto a chair by the table. "But there's no use considering the notion too much... there's no way they'd trust a werewolf for a desk job, much less fighting dark wizards."

All of the sudden Harry became very uncomfortable. Dark wizards... did he count as one now that he'd performed some dark spells?

Remus must have picked up on the sudden aura of nervousness and fear surrounding Harry. "What is it?"

"What's what?" asked Harry dumbly, trying to mask his slip-up.

"I don't know... you look agitated."

"Huh, well, I'm fine," said Harry, looking away.

Remus dropped it, but Harry knew he was suspicious. Fortunately Sirius walked in a moment later and broke the awkward silence.

“Moony! Up so early?”

“Well, it is Christmas, right? Anyone can be up early and not need an excuse,” grinned Remus. The expression made him look years younger, despite the light wrinkles on his face.

Sirius then caught sight of Harry. The man’s expression immediately darkened. “Oh, uh, hey Harry.”

“Hello,” Harry nodded.

Harry could tell that Sirius was extremely unsettled about him being a Slytherin. After trying so hard to break away from the Slytherin society that carried on into pureblood culture (and thus to the Black family) he knew Sirius might understand what it was like for Harry more than any Gryffindor. Still, Sirius was nothing like the serpents – he wouldn’t fit in amongst those who used planning and deceit. He was pure Gryffindor at heart.

“I can’t wait until Eric opens the present I got him,” said Sirius eagerly. He pulled up a chair next to Remus and sat down, facing his friend and pointedly not looking at Harry. Sirius had always been like his parents in that respect – he wouldn’t pay much attention to Harry if Eric was around. But now he had an even better reason to dislike the dark-haired boy... no one was more against Slytherin than Sirius.

Harry walked to the family room and sat down in an armchair with his hot cocoa. It could almost be a pleasant holiday if it weren’t for the fact that he was an outsider in his own family.

Lily and James entered the room a few minutes later and Lily set to work right away in the kitchen making Christmas breakfast. The house smelled delightful and cheery, full of spices and sweets. When Eric finally made his way downstairs, everyone was up and talking happily, livened with holiday joy. Harry sat to the side and watched his family smiling and even allowed himself to enjoy a little of the spirit.

“Happy Christmas everyone!” Eric shouted as he bounded into the kitchen. He hugged each parent and his uncles quickly and then

came near Harry to inspect the presents under the tree. Naturally, there were loads for him and very few for anyone else.

“Can we open presents right away?” asked Eric eagerly, picking a particularly large one up.

“I suppose so,” smiled Lily. “We’ll eat breakfast afterwards, then.”

The first four or five were for Eric. Harry watched his Gryffindor brother open a jumper from Mrs. Weasley, a new version of Exploding Snap, a book on Quidditch, and a bag full of Zonko’s joke products. On the fifth, he ripped open a package that contained a beautiful material, and Harry’s mouth dropped open in surprise.

In awe, Eric pulled out a beautiful invisibility cloak and pulled it on, promptly disappearing. “Merlin, this is cool!” his voice said from where he once stood.

“That’s an old family heirloom,” James explained, smiling. “It’s been passed down through the Potter line for generations, and now it’s time for you to have it too, son.”

Harry burned with envy. That was an indescribably useful gift, and he sincerely hoped Eric wouldn’t use it for stupid things like pulling pranks.

Finally there was a gift for Harry – a smallish rectangular box. He glanced at the tag and suddenly had a dropping feeling in his stomach.

Harry,

You may need this for our lessons soon. I have a matching one, and maybe if you do well you’ll earn it as well.

Lyrian

With some trepidation he slid open the box to reveal a beautiful dark dagger. Harry wished he could sit and appreciate it, but to be frank, his family wasn’t quite so interested in admiring it.

“What the hell?” exclaimed James, “What sick fuck is sending an eleven-year-old a dagger for Christmas?”

“That thing reeks of dark magic, Harry,” said Remus, shying away from it as if burned.

Sirius grabbed the box away from Harry and stared at the tag. “Who the hell is Lyrian?”

“It’s that fifth year kid; he’s like the poster-boy for Slytherin!” said Eric. “What are you doing, Harry, taking lessons from him? In what, how to kill people with daggers?”

Harry’s mouth was dry. Fuck you, Lyrian, he thought viciously.

“What do you have to say for yourself, Harry?” James yelled, anger lacing his voice. “After Eric talked to us saying that maybe you could be changed, if we just treated you as if you were a Gryffindor... hah. And I actually said I’d try!”

“I... I’m just having study sessions with him, I don’t know what he’s talking about or why he sent me a weapon!” lied Harry, unable to stay silent any longer.

“I thought we raised you better than to lie to us, Harry,” Lily said quietly. It was the first time his mother had spoken to him in a long time, and her words pierced him.

Harry’s magic gave a surge and the delicate decorations on the Christmas tree suddenly shattered. Glass exploded out like shrapnel, hitting Eric especially badly. Bits of blood dotted the boy’s face where the sharp glass struck. Harry looked around, horrified, and then took off running out of the house.

He didn’t care that it was cold as fuck and that he wasn’t wearing any shoes, he just ran and ran and wanted to get away from it all. “Merlin, damn it, Lyrian!” he screamed, tripping and falling into the snow, which scraped him uncomfortably.

A blackbird sung up on one of the tree branches above him, mocking him. Christmas cheer was an illusion; holidays had always been hellish and always would be. The anger built up in Harry, hot and uncontrollable. He whipped his wand out of his pocket without thinking, and took aim at that fucking bird.

“Spiculum!” he yelled. The familiar feeling of reviving pleasure traveled through his body and Harry almost gasped from the joy of it. It felt so good... he felt so powerful... it was like his magic was tingling within him, dancing through every cell.

The bird squawked in pain, and crisscross marks must have appeared on its little chest, but they were too small to be seen on the tiny thing. It took flight and began to flap, but within a few seconds its flaps became weaker and weaker. A drop of blood fell down from it and landed on the snow, staining it. Soon, the bird itself followed, falling to the ground and slowly bleeding to death. Harry watched the scene as a few tremors raced through his body. He was horrified and delighted at the same time. Fucking bird.

He took heaving breaths, in and out, for as long as it took to relax. When he started to gain control again (and start to notice the numbness in his freezing limbs) he looked back at the dying bird. He was a monster. It didn't deserve to die. Why had he done that? He'd killed something. Something innocent!

He couldn't stay with his family any more. Maybe he'd have to return to them today, but this summer he needed to be elsewhere. Someone would take him in, right? Someone who understood; someone Slytherin.

Harry remained outside for far longer than was healthy. He watched blood pool around the poor bird on the snow with a sense of horrified detachment. After far too long in the cold, he picked himself up and began to drudge back to the Potter house with a sense of doom. When he got close to the door, he noticed that Eric was coming outside to sit on the porch with a heavy coat on and his Gryffindor scarf.

Eric looked up at him sadly as his brother approached. He shook his head with an air of fatigue. "You're too far gone already, aren't you?"

Harry just stared at Eric, more tired than anything now.

"I tried, Harry," said Eric simply, and then he turned away from Harry. The family had already gone through most of the presents while Harry was gone, although Harry knew that it must have taken them a while to settle down after the dagger event. The dagger was still lying there on the ground when he entered.

Everyone looked at him when he came back into the house. They were all sitting in the kitchen eating Christmas breakfast. Harry avoided catching any eyes, gathered the few presents under the tree that were remaining for him, and subtly slipped the dagger into the pile. He then retreated to his room upstairs, where he would spend the rest of the holiday avoiding anything about his family.

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The end of Christmas couldn't come fast enough for Harry. New Years had gone by rather uneventfully – for him, anyway. He had, like a hermit, hid in his room for the most part, only coming down for food every so often.

It had been a mistake to let Eric convince him to come home. The tension in the house after the incident was unbearable. He would have been so much happier back at Hogwarts, and he was sorely looking forward to returning to the Slytherin dungeons, cold and unforgiving as they were.

The ride back to school in the beginning of January went quickly and in no time Harry was back in the Slytherin common room, eagerly awaiting the first day of classes. While shut up in his room, he'd studied textbooks and practiced a few spells, and he was confident he'd be far ahead in his classes.

"Hey, Harry," a feminine voice sounded from his right. Harry had been sitting in one of the emerald armchairs, reading, and he looked up to see Tracey Davis.



“Oh, hi, Tracey,” he replied, her first name feeling unfamiliar in his mouth. He normally called her Davis, but since she had used his first name, he had responded in kind.

“What’re you reading?” she asked, leaning close to his book.

“Just our transfiguration text...I wanted to get ahead a little bit,” he answered, but as she peered over his shoulder she began to whisper in his ear.

“What do you say to another lesson exchange?” she murmured. “Meet me at our last spot in a few minutes?”

“Yeah, sure,” responded Harry under his breath. She left and after a minute he followed after running upstairs to get his charms book too.

They had last met in an abandoned room in Hogwarts on the second floor. Hogwarts held a lot of random places that might or might not show up all of the time, or were once used for something else. Harry had a suspicion that the room they used was once a defense classroom, since there were cracks and scorch marks on the walls.

He wandered through the doorway to the classroom to see Tracey there, waiting patiently with wand in hand. He met with her every couple weeks to review what they went over in class, and he had formed a cordial sort of acquaintance with the girl.

“Do I get my spellweaving lesson first, this time?” he asked, smirking. Often she would insist that she get transfiguration or charms help first.

“I guess so, Harry, if you promise not to run away afterwards,” she laughed. There she went again, using his first name. It sounded far friendlier than he was used to, and he wasn’t sure he was comfortable with it.

He smiled anyway and the two sat down on the floor as she began to speak.

“So I’ve told you some ways of modifying spells so far to change their effect, but I haven’t really introduced you to the other part of spellweaving, which is spell creation. I only know the basics, remember, but hopefully it will help.”

Harry felt a thrill run through his body – this was the really interesting stuff.

“Now if you want to get really good at this, like how the masters do it, you’ll have to study Latin and perhaps Greek too. If you want to, you can do that on the side. What I can show you is how the wand motions relate to the spell being cast... well, there are a few loose guidelines, anyway,” she admitted, her light brown eyes sparkling.

“I think I remember Mum telling me that wand movements originally started out as tracing runes in the air and then branched out from there... so ancient rune knowledge is also a big portion of what the masters know. But if you want to create a spell, you’ll often have to know some math formulas from Arithmancy to calculate the angle and geometric shape of the wand movement. To make it easy, though, there are some general motion shapes that have certain tendencies... like how circular wand movements are often used for charms that involve moving objects. Hexes and curses often end with sharp jabs of the wand forward, and transfiguration uses a bunch of triangles.”

“So how can I make my own spell, knowing those?” Harry asked.

“Well, take a Latin root that we know from classes... how about the prefix curr- from the verb currare, to run? Maybe you can create a spell that makes it so an enchanted object zooms across the floor as if running? So you’d use a circular wand motion for that since it’s about charming an object to move. I don’t know. The experts know how to really hone what a spell does, but for novice spellweavers, it is mostly guesswork,” she shrugged.

“Wicked,” said Harry, eyes wide and delighted at the possibilities. “So should I give it a try?”

"If you want to... but be careful. It's really unpredictable and sometimes things can backfire pretty badly," Tracey warned, but she leaned toward him and he could tell she wanted him to attempt it.

Harry took off his shoe and placed it on the ground in front of him. He stood and was about to point his wand at it when he realized he had no idea how to make up a spell. Just give a circular wave and say some words and hope for the best?

"Well here goes nothing..." Harry murmured. Tracey backed away behind him, giving him a wide berth.

"Curras!" yelled Harry. He swirled his wand in a circular motion and then flicked it at the shoe.

The shoe started twitching, almost, and then started ripping itself apart. Tracey began to laugh as the shoe literally burst at the seams. Harry snickered as well. "Whoops," he said, grinning.

"Reparo," he said, and the shoe mostly returned to how it was before, though it looked a bit more worn.

"Maybe this time I'll try a different variation on the word..." he mumbled as he stared at the shoe again.

"Go for it," Tracey encouraged from behind him, although she backed up again.

"Curramis!" cried Harry, changing his wand motion a little bit but still keeping it circular.

This time the shoe started to give the impression of running in place – although it looked a little like it was bucking back and forth wildly. Harry had the sense that he was close to getting it to move across the room.

"Better," Tracey admitted.

"I'll give it one more shot... maybe I'll change the circle cast a bit more," he suggested. He placed the shoe back how it was and then took his stance again.

"Curramis!" he said again, but this time he made the wand motion a bit more oval than before.

This time the shoe began to 'run' twitchily, but it was going backwards! Tracey broke out giggling and Harry joined her.

"Hey at least you didn't start any fires, or anything," she said between chuckles.

"At least," Harry agreed. "Well, I think I'd better start reading up on Latin, ancient runes, and Arithmancy if I want to be better... ugh, why is it that we have to wait for third year to take those classes?"

"I don't know, but it's pretty stupid if you ask me," sighed Tracey. "Especially since those are my family's traditional specialties."

"Yeah," Harry sympathized. "So let's go over that last charms lesson before break..."

He tutored Tracey in their last lesson, which was a rather complicated one. Throughout the entire time she seemed to be extra smiley and friendly with him, which was a little bit confusing. Tracey didn't... she didn't like him, did she? He wasn't interested in that crap, well, not yet anyways... but girls always did seem to get stupid crushes even when they were as young as first years.

Oh well, Harry decided. I guess it makes her pleasant to work with, at least.

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Tracey wasn't the only girl Harry got to know better once he came back from Christmas. As it turned out, Hermione Granger had a strange sort of fascination with him too, which became obvious another day when they met in the library.

He had been studying peacefully when she suddenly walked up to him from another table and broke his thoughts. Naturally, he had a right to be snarky, right?

“Look, Potter, I’m sure you’ve noticed that I’m a bit annoying when it comes to competing with you at schoolwork, but I can’t hold it in any longer. How in the world do you manage to outdo me in every class?” she said quickly, as if the words had been on her tongue for a while.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Someone’s a bit sore,” he smirked. “What are you, obsessed with being perfect? And you’re right – you are quite annoying in potions class. Thank Merlin that’s the only class we have with Gryffindors,” he said in a long-suffering voice.

She frowned but then launched back into her tirade. “I just don’t understand. Take potions for example... I always follow every recipe to the letter, and I get the right results, and yet your potion is always somehow more right than mine! How does that even happen?”

“Well, duh. It’s precisely because you follow every recipe to the letter,” said Harry, blinking. “Now if you please, I’d like to get back to my reading. Maybe if you spent less time following my stupid brother around, you’d get more studying done too.”

“I get plenty of time for studying, thank you very much,” Hermione sniffed. “And maybe if you actually had any friends you would be a nicer person, but I guess that’s too much to hope for.”

Harry darkened. Her words bothered him more than he would let her know. When he was little, all he really wanted was a friend, and yet here he was at school with no people to confide in or help him out... just teachers and students he associated with, but no one with which to joke or laugh.

“But that’s beside the point. What do you mean, that I’m doing it wrong because I follow the directions?” she persisted. Her bushy hair fell into her face and she pushed it behind an ear absently, more concerned with getting answers.

“Granger, if you actually took the time to understand why the ingredients work together, rather than just memorizing what goes with what, you could improve the standard directions too. Now go away and spend more time looking that stuff up and less time bothering me,” snapped Harry.

Hermione didn't have to be told twice. She'd looked a little downtrodden at the remark about her just memorizing facts (because she knew it was true) but her eyes became alight with a new passion once he'd given her the hint.

Harry groaned and put his head on his book, her words about friendship echoing through his mind. He needed to make friends if he wanted someone to possibly stay with over the summer, but it was just so uncomfortable for him. He'd never had a friend, and he'd never really been loyal to anyone... that was Hufflepuff stuff. Harry liked going in his own direction, but if he had a friend, he'd have to answer to someone and compromise with someone. He supposed it was selfish, but he'd lose some of his independence.

Not to mention that he didn't really know how to be genuinely nice, all the time. He'd go through moody phases and then he'd find himself manipulating people or using them for various reasons rather than getting along with them just for the sake of it. Ugh!

Getting a friend would also would probably mean declaring a position in Slytherin, so then his house would look at him differently and he'd lose respect in somebody's eyes, even if he did gain it in others.

Sometimes being a Slytherin sucked, Harry decided. In other houses you could make friends with anyone you wanted, easily, and no one would really care who or why.

But at the same time, Slytherin really did feel like the place for him.

Don't worry, Harry's not going to be getting in any relationships for some time now... but I think it is totally plausible that Tracey could have a crush on Harry - after all, Ginny as a 10/11 year old had a crush on him in the canon series!

Some more POVs are coming up in the next chapters, so I hope you will enjoy that. :)

Hehe. Harry's first couple years at Hogwarts are filled with him doing a ton of learning... because he's going to get pretty powerful later on. :D Not infallible, but he definitely will be strong. I hope that the spellweaving / dark magic / Occlumency lessons aren't too boring.

If anyone has any suggestions for things they want in upcoming chapters, go for it and tell me in reviews. I have plans but if someone gives a particularly good idea, I could definitely head in that direction. (Big hugs to reviewers. You guys inspire me so much!)

## Chapter 8: A Month with Moon

“So what the hell, Lyrian? Really,” said Harry flatly as he entered the Room of Requirement. He had the dagger in hand and he gestured at it angrily.

“No one’s ever appreciative,” said Lyrian, smirking. He rolled his eyes. “That’s a nice weapon, you know.”

“Nice or not, I didn’t ask for a Christmas gift that practically emanates dark magic,” Harry snapped sullenly. “Way to make my holiday extra hellish this year.”

“Christmas is overrated anyway,” quipped Lyrian, tossing his golden hair out of his eyes. “Now help me set up these targets – we’re doing accuracy practice today.”

Harry stewed, but helped the older boy set up targets around the room. Once they had finished, Lyrian whipped out his wand and charmed them to move around the room like insects, zigzagging in directions at random times.

“It’s going to be impossible to hit those! They’re going way too fast... by the time I aim, they’ll be across the room!” cried Harry as he watched the targets zip around the place.

“Stop whining and just get it done, Harry,” ordered Lyrian. “First we’ll do it with some easy spell... how about expelliarmus. Watch me first.”

Harry watched as Lyrian took a dueling stance and then began to cry ‘expelliarmus’ as fast as his tongue would allow. Some of the spells missed their targets, but most were dead on, despite the speed and erratic movements of the targets.

Finally Lyrian ceased his casting and turned to face Harry, breathing heavily. “Your turn,” he grinned between breaths.

To be perfectly honest, for the first few times Harry tried, he was really, really bad. He kept aiming well for targets but they’d always turn a direction he didn’t expect. “Merlin, how do you do this?”



“Practice, Harry. Practice, and using what you know about magic. Anything magical or enchanted has an aura, and auras travel faster than physical things do... so if you get used to watching objects’ magical signatures move first, you’ll know where they go,” Lyrian explained.

“I don’t know how to see auras, though,” said Harry.

“Well, you don’t see them. You feel them. It’s especially easy for dark wizards, too. We get used to the feeling of magic rushing in our veins, and auras have that sensation too. It’s pure, invisible magic. You just have to learn to sense them from a distance, rather than from within.”

That still sounded difficult to Harry. He didn’t know where to start.

“Here, you might have an easier time if you’re casting dark spells,” Lyrian suggested. “Remember that spell I taught you last time we met? Capimorsus?”

“Yeah,” Harry responded. Capimorsus was a dark spell that first gave the target a sudden migraine and then began to slow the speed of neural transmission, so that thoughts (and thus actions) came slower. It was easily avoidable if one knew the countercharm, but for anyone who didn’t... well, they’d be a little slow on their feet for a while.

“Use that on the targets. It obviously won’t really do anything to them, but at least you’ll get the sensation of casting a dark spell to help you out.”

“Okay,” agreed Harry. The targets were still whizzing in every direction around him.

“Capimorsus! Capimorsus! Capimorsus!” he cried, aiming at random targets.

The effect was instantaneous. That same, addictive pleasure rose within Harry like a wave, and with each cast he felt lighter, quicker, smarter, stronger. He was still missing most of the targets, but he

began to understand what Lyrian was talking about in regards to auras.

Every once in a while he'd have the sensation that magic was concentrated someplace in the room, and sure enough, a target would move into that space in an instant. His ability was spotty at best, but at least he could do a little better than before.

"Good job, Harry," praised Lyrian. The older boy's intense blue eyes were flashing with delight, and Harry could sense the echoes of Lyrian's aura for a second too. "You have no idea how much you are going to dominate your classmates in dueling."

Harry grinned in response. He hadn't thought of that. Mostly, he just loved to learn everything, and that was why he had agreed to these lessons. But to be the best of the best at dueling... well, that was an attractive idea.

Harry resumed his stance. "Let's do it again... I want to get it perfect!"

Lyrian snickered and then watched as Harry gave it another go.

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Harry needed a way to follow Eric around. His last report for Quirrell hadn't been up to par, in his opinion, and he desperately needed something better. Just telling Quirrell what presents Eric got for Christmas really wasn't good enough....

The idea came to him suddenly in the middle of January just as he was waking up one Sunday morning. He could use the invisibility cloak! If he could get the cloak from Eric somehow, he could trail his brother and find out what he was really up to, in detail. How was he going to get it, though?

He trotted down to the Slytherin common room after taking a shower and noticed how empty the area was. A lot of students were sleeping in, and in fact there was one older boy who was snoring on one of the couches, still wearing his rumpled clothes from the night before.

However, there was one familiar face that fully awake and alert – Sonia Moon.

She was reclining in an armchair, reading some novel or another. Harry realized that he always saw Sonia with her face in a book, and suddenly was curious about what she was reading. Hmm. Seeing her, a plan blossomed in Harry's mind.

"Good morning," he greeted, sliding into a seat across from her.

"Hello," she said quietly, placing a bookmark onto the page she was at and closing her novel. "What do you want, Potter?"

"No need to be so snappy, Moon," drawled Harry. "Am I not allowed to have a simple conversation?"

"Since when do you have conversations with people just for the sake of it?" she asked skeptically, arching a perfect eyebrow.

Harry ignored the comment and abruptly changed the subject. "Up for a game of wizard's chess?"

She considered it for a moment, a bit thrown off by the sudden offer. "I guess so."

Harry grabbed one of the chess boards that were for general use in the Slytherin common room, and he set it up on a table between him and the girl. She watched amusedly and then assembled her pieces; Harry followed suit.

The chess pieces were generally very quiet, both from overuse and also because they trusted that the crafty Slytherins who ordered them around had good reasons for their moves. Harry and Sonia played for a little while, not talking, when suddenly Harry broke the silence. "So you're pretty good in potions class, I've noticed," said Harry, his eyes still on the board.

"Not as good as you," remarked Sonia, regarding him with her unsettling yellow-green eyes. Her gaze was hawkish, and against her olive skin, her unusual eye color really stood out.

“Maybe,” Harry admitted, “But you’re definitely one of the best in the class.”

Sonia didn’t comment for a while. She moved a knight to threaten one of his bishops. “What are you getting at, Potter? Last time I checked, you weren’t going around throwing out compliments.”

“How would you like to attempt to make a potion with me – for a good cause, of course,” he added, smiling winningly.

“Go on, you’ve got my attention,” she nodded, her eyes flickering up to his face when she wasn’t concentrating on her next move.

“Polyjuice potion,” he said bluntly. “It’s complex and takes weeks to make, but it would be quite the project, right?”

“Polyjuice? What in Salazar’s name are you going to use that for?” asked Sonia, for the first time looking truly surprised. She kept her voice low and leaned in toward him so as not to wake the sleeping student not far to their left.

“I need to nick something of my twin’s from Gryffindor tower,” Harry explained quietly. “And to make the help worth your while, we could not only save some potion for... later needs, but I could also give you use of the object sometimes.”

“And what is this thing you so desperately need?” she asked, cocking her head to the side.

“Eric’s invisibility cloak – he just got it for Christmas.”

“Oh,” said Sonia, eyes wide. She sat back on her chair again. “Well, then. That could be quite useful indeed.”

“So are you up for brewing the potion?” he asked, moving his queen out to put her in check.

“You are aware that Polyjuice is basically a N.E.W.T. level potion, right?” she pointed out.

“Well, yes,” admitted Harry. He knew their likelihood of success was rather low, even though they were both gifted in potions.

“Good. Let’s give it a shot, then.”

Harry grinned and while they finished their game, they began to plot how to obtain the necessary ingredients.

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Severus Snape sorted through his storeroom of potions ingredients, labeling anything without a tag and shuffling them around, so they’d be in order of properties. He knew that sometimes he was a little compulsive about keeping his things in the exact right places, but that didn’t matter to him. This was something he actually enjoyed, unlike teaching snotty little toerags and pubescent teenagers how to make a Pepperup potion.

He went along the second shelf contentedly, arranging some ingredients that had been put away a little hastily and inspecting others to make sure they were still in good quality. Then up to the third shelf, where his eyes ran across the labels, checking each one off in his mind.

Erumpent parts, hellebore, horned slugs, boomslang skin... wait.

He could have sworn that last week, there was at least twice as much boomslang skin as there was now.

Mind instantly racing, Severus Snape searched for a suspect. Potter – Harry Potter. It had to be him. No doubt that thieving little copy of James thought it’d be funny to steal from old Snivellus. When Severus had been busy last week after class, showing Miss Moon a variation on the boil cure potion, he suspected that Potter was up to something. It was only after he’d finished lecturing the girl, though, that he saw Potter emerge from the side of the room, suspiciously near his storeroom.

“Potter! What do you think you’re still doing in here?” he had barked.

“Sorry, sir,” the boy had apologized, “I was just cleaning up my Chizpurfle quills; they went all over the floor when I was bringing them back to the container.”

Immediately Snape had attempted to confirm this story by using Legilimency, but the boy wouldn’t look him in the eye! Potter was still staring down at the ground, sweeping up the last few quills. Snape snarled and turned back to Miss Moon, who was watching the exchange neutrally.

“Thank you for explaining that to me, sir,” she responded politely. At least some Slytherins had a sense of etiquette and decorum.

They both packed their belongings up and Snape strode over to Potter, watching closely as the boy fastened his bag. “Five points from Slytherin for your carelessness, Potter.”

The boy had the audacity to look surprised that Snape would take points off from his own house. No matter. Snape would just reward the next Slytherin an extra-large amount for the next thing.

The two exited the potions classroom, leaving Snape alone in the dungeons once more. Now, of course, his train of thought was on Potter.

He had been miffed that, at the last Quidditch match, James Potter had been there, but not rooting for Slytherin as Snape would have hoped. If only Minerva hadn’t made Eric Potter the Gryffindor seeker, he might have had the joy of seeing James Potter dressed in green and silver, cheering for his son.

After discovering that both twins would be playing against each other, Snape knew that James would have to pick a side, and it would obviously be Gryffindor. How could it not be; not only was James an arrogant Gryffindor himself, but his Gryffindor son was the famous Boy-Who-Lived!

And yet, there was still some part of him that found it odd that Potter never even seemed to acknowledge his other son. In fact, both he

and his wife seemed to actively avoid the other boy. Even though Snape hated the Potters, he knew that that sort of behavior was out of character for them. Especially Lily – she had been one of the kindest, most understanding people he'd ever met. She wouldn't hate her son for going to Slytherin, would she?

Snape shook his head as if to discard the thought, and continued searching through his storeroom, just to make sure the boomslang skin hadn't been misplaced somewhere else. There were other important things he had on his mind, too.

The Potters' behavior hadn't been the only odd happening at that Quidditch match. When Eric Potter's broom started to malfunction, Snape knew that the Nimbus 2000 was getting jinxed, and he had a suspicion by whom. Quirrell. He didn't have time to search around, though, so he'd quickly begun to mutter the counterjinx – this was as good a time as any to repay part of that stupid life debt he owed James Potter for saving his life in sixth year.

He'd stopped the broom from going haywire just when Harry Potter caught the snitch for Slytherin's win. It looked suspicious because of the unfortunate timing, that one of the Slytherins had fixed the game, but Snape didn't care too much. The boy had surprised him by not helping his brother up, and he wasn't quite sure what to think. How had Potter's loyalties to his house grown so strong, stronger than to the family who had raised him for the past ten years?

Snape wasn't sure what to think about the boy. But if he'd been stealing from Snape's personal storeroom, well, that definitely didn't bode well for him. Snape was irate, and if he could ever get proof that Potter had taken the boomslang skin, then he was going to give him a month of detentions faster than you could say 'Slytherin'.

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"I can't go in there!" protested Harry.

Sonia Moon was pushing open the door to the restroom – but not any old restroom – it was a girls' loo.

“Get a hold of yourself, Potter, your bits won’t get cursed off for stepping through this door,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“How do you know that?” asked Harry, standing firmly still in the hallway on the second floor.

“Oh come on, it’s just an abandoned loo. No one comes in here anyway; there’s just an annoying old ghost that haunts one of the stalls,” explained Sonia. She grabbed his wrist and pulled him in before he could protest further.

“I still don’t know why you think this is the best place to brew our potion for a month. So you’re serious – no one uses this place?” asked Harry skeptically. He glanced around the spacious restroom, taking note of the long row of stalls and the fine carvings on the sinks, which were arranged in a circle in the center of the room.

“Not after the first few weeks of school or so; then all the first-year girls figure out that this place is better left alone,” she whispered, leaning close to Harry. Harry was about to ask why she had to speak so lowly when suddenly a screeching wail sounded from their left.

“That’s right, no one likes me,” a high-pitched voice whined. Harry turned quickly, grabbing his wand, when he saw that it was the ghost of a young girl with lank hair, lots of pimples, and thick glasses.

“Hello, Myrtle,” said Sonia soothingly.

“Don’t ‘hello, Myrtle’ me,” the ghost bawled. “D’you think I don’t know what people call me behind my back? Fat Myrtle! Ugly Myrtle! Miserable, moping, moaning Myrtle!”

“I’m sure that’s not true –” Harry began, lying completely, but the ghost cut him off.

“And what are you doing in here? Boys aren’t allowed in the girls’ loo!” Myrtle howled, completely distraught.

“We’re just going to use this place to make a potion, okay Myrtle?” explained Sonia softly, trying to calm the moody ghost down.



"Fine! Just make my restroom into a potions laboratory, why don't you? No one ever asks me if it's okay, they just go right on ahead!" screamed Myrtle, thick ghostly tears pouring down her face, and then she promptly flew upwards in the air where she turned and dived into a toilet with a loud plop.

"Well, then," said Harry, stunned.

"So now you see why this is a safe place to hide it," stated Sonia, sounding satisfied that her plan was going well.

"Yeah I suppose so," agreed Harry.

The two then set to work, taking out their materials and setting up the large cauldron. Harry had discovered a book called *Moste Potente Potions* in the Room of Requirement when he was last there, and while he wasn't able to take the book out of the room, he did copy all of the instructions down before he left.

So the two read down the list of ingredients, checking to make sure they had them all. Lacewing flies, leeches, powdered bicorn horn, knotgrass, fluxweed picked at full moon, and shredded boomslang skin.

"The only thing we still need is a bit of whoever you're turning into," Sonia muttered, checking over the list again. "By the way, Potter, your handwriting is horrendous," she added

"I try," responded Harry cheekily.

"Well, who are you going to turn into, anyway?"

"I was thinking I'd be Neville Longbottom, you know, that chubby Gryffindor kid that fell off his broom at our flying lessons?" suggested Harry.

"Gross," remarked Sonia.

“Yeah, well, he’s known for being forgetful so if I don’t know the password to Gryffindor tower, no one will suspect me. That, and I’ll have a free pass up to the first-year boys’ dormitory,” reasoned Harry.

“Good point, but I’d still be disgusted if I had to turn into someone like him, or the Granger girl, with her bushy hair and buck-teeth. Merlin, she’s like a mixture between a squirrel and a beaver,” laughed Sonia cruelly.

Harry thought that was going a little far, but he stayed silent. He supposed Sonia could go around judging people like that because she was a natural beauty, with exquisite features even on a young eleven-year-old’s face. He ignored the comment and they continued to work.

“So what are you going to use the potion for?” asked Harry as he lit a fire under the cauldron.

“I’m not sure, yet. But I figure it’s an invaluable thing to have around – that is, if we get it right,” she added logically. “I don’t know. I’m sure something will come up.”

Harry nodded. “And the invisibility cloak?”

“I want that for getting into the restricted section in the library,” she admitted. “I’m crazy about books, if you hadn’t noticed – textbooks, novels, whatever. The hat wanted to put me in Ravenclaw until I begged it for Slytherin.”

“Really? Why’d you want Slytherin so badly?”

She turned to him, almost disgusted. “Come on now, Harry, who wouldn’t want Slytherin? My family has been predominately Slytherin for ages, although we’re not in such a high standing as we used to be, because of all the squibs...” her voice trailed off, agitated. “If I got put in Ravenclaw, I’d be amongst a bunch of mudbloods and muggle-lovers. Revolting, if you ask me.”

Harry’s cheeks burned as he thought of his own family. They were muggle-lovers, like Sonia spoke of, and his mother was a mudblood.

He wondered if Sonia thought of him like that; she sure seemed to at the beginning of the year.

Sonia's thoughts seemed to have wandered in that direction as well. "How do you stand it, Potter?"

"What?" he asked as he started pouring the lacewing flies into the cauldron for stewing.

"Being around your repulsive family," she said, her pretty face distorted into a nauseated expression.

"It's not easy," responded Harry truthfully, thinking about the many days that he'd sat in his small room alone, trying to stay away from his parents, who were constantly showering Eric with love and attention.

"Does your mudblood mum actually do things... the muggle way?" Sonia whispered curiously, as if it were taboo to even think of the concept.

Harry let out a short laugh. "Yeah, she does," he admitted. "She hardly even uses magic when she cooks – she says the muggle way of preparing food makes it taste better."

"That's just barbarous and stupid. There's nothing wrong with magical food preparation," said Sonia, exasperated.

"Yeah, I know," Harry acknowledged. "I guess it's just a mudblood thing."

As soon as the words left his mouth, Harry felt a bit of guilt creep up into his conscience. He'd just called his mother a mudblood without putting any thought to the matter. He pushed the guilt away roughly. It was just a stupid word.

He and Sonia continued to prepare the potion until they could do no more, and then they left the cauldron to stew the lacewing flies for the required twenty-one days. As they left the girls' loo, Harry made plans

to meet up with her again in a week to check on it, and the two parted ways.

As she walked down the corridor, he watched her long black plait bounce behind her. She was flawed and deeply prejudiced towards anything muggle, but he felt that maybe he'd done an okay job of attempting to make a friend. He could have tried to make the potion on his own, and use his own devices to steal the boomslang skin from Snape's storeroom, but it was much easier with an accomplice.

It was much more fun, too.

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The task of getting a piece of Neville Longbottom was a little bit concerning, though. One of his hairs would probably be the easiest, though Harry supposed some other parts... like toenail clippings... could work. The thought of shoveling Longbottom's nail shavings into a phial was nauseating, though, so he resigned himself to getting a hair.

He'd have to get the hair in potions class, as it was the only one that the Slytherins and Gryffindors shared. The next morning Harry sauntered into the dungeons on the early side so that he could pick a seat in the back. He normally sat up front on one side of the classroom (the side where the Slytherins usually gravitated towards) but to pick out one of Longbottom's hairs, he'd need to be behind him.

Only a pair of Gryffindors and a Slytherin had arrived yet. He recognized the two Gryffindors as Seamus Finnegan and Dean Thomas, both roommates of Eric although not some of Eric's closest friends. The solitary Slytherin was Blaise Zabini, who was flipping through a notebook idly while he waited for class to begin.

Harry needed to kill some time while he waited for Longbottom to enter the room, so he strode up to Zabini and voiced something he'd been wondering about for a while.

"Hey Zabini, why'd you stick around at Hogwarts for Christmas? I remember seeing your name on the list," he asked. It only occurred to

him afterwards that it might have been an insensitive question, but he decided he didn't really care, anyway.

"None of your business, Potter," Zabini snapped.

"Touched a nerve, have I? I guess your famous mum just doesn't want you around?" Harry goaded. He didn't really know why he was being such a prat, but it felt good to tease someone else about their family for once, rather than getting teased about his.

"Speak for yourself, Potter," growled Zabini.

Harry supposed he should have seen that one coming.

Before he could come up with a good retort, though, more students began to rush into the classroom, including Longbottom. The chubby Gryffindor boy walked in a little behind Eric, Hermione, and Ron, and he picked a seat on the edge of the 'Gryffindor side' of the room. Harry shrugged a goodbye to Zabini, who didn't respond at all, and walked up to sit in the set behind Neville.

His action didn't go unnoticed. The Slytherins all looked at him strangely, especially Draco. "Decide you wanted to be a Gryffindor, today, did you?" Draco snickered as he walked into the classroom with Vincent and Gregory at his heels.

Harry just shrugged at him and exchanged glances with Sonia Moon as she walked into the room as well. Finally – someone who didn't look confused about the situation. She, however, continued to the Slytherin side of the classroom and sat down in the front row, in her usual seat.

"What are you doing here?" Hermione asked, turning around in her seat.

"Sweet Merlin, is it such a crime to get a different view of the classroom?" snapped Harry. He then settled back, getting control of himself. "Besides, the potion fumes are thickest in the front of the room where I normally am, and that can't be healthy."

Before she could ask why he came to the Gryffindor section, then, (and he knew the question was on the tip of her tongue) Snape came out from his office in the back.

“Silence,” Snape said softly, and the students immediately hushed. Harry had to give it to the man; he had a gift for controlling a class.

“Today you will be brewing forgetfulness potions.” He tapped his wand to the blackboard and instructions spelled themselves out with spindly letters that definitely matched Snape’s spiky script. “I expect your potions at the end of the period on my desk, corked and labeled. That will be all.”

Harry blinked as the man turned away from them to go back into his office. If he didn’t know better, he could have sworn that Snape was limping slightly. Was that why he was just going to leave the first years on their own to make a new potion?

The rest of the class seemed as baffled as he was, but they all set to work. The Gryffindor side of the room, which he was currently sitting on, was decidedly more cheery than usual. Harry supposed it was because Snape wouldn’t be breathing down their necks every step of the way, taking points for minor infractions or sometimes for nothing at all.

After gathering the materials, Harry got his cauldron simmering and sliced his caterpillars in one-centimeter long chunks. He dumped them into the warm pot and then looked to the board for the next instruction.

Mash belladonna berries until they form a thick paste; add to cauldron  
Add thirty-four milliliters of soaking solution  
Stir counter-clockwise three times; let soak for four minutes

Harry’s brow furrowed. Belladonna berries’ magical properties emerged when stirred counter-clockwise (and in that direction only), but he knew that when added to other ingredients it usually took more rotations to get the same effect. As Harry often did in potions class, he decided to change up the recipe just a bit and add a few more

counter-clockwise stirs. Most often when he altered the potions, his version turned out better than anyone else's.

When he had stirred five times, rather than the required three, he sat back to wait the four minutes while the materials soaked. He watched Neville Longbottom ahead of him, still mashing his belladonna berries. The boy began to add them when they weren't quite a paste; there were still chunks of berry within the mixture.

Stupid boy, Harry thought, getting irritated by just watching the boy prepare the potion wrong. He got his wand out and furtively pointed it at Longbottom's bottle of soaking solution. "Pulsus," he muttered.

The solution was suddenly knocked off the table, and when Longbottom bent over to pick it up, Harry took his chance. Longbottom's head was right in front of him – he just needed to get the hair!

"Traxi hair," whispered Harry, directing his focus to a single hair on the boy's head. The pulling spell worked perfectly. A single brown hair popped out of the boy's head and flew back into Harry's palm. Harry quickly stashed his wand and the hair back in his pocket.

"Ow!" yelled Longbottom, shooting up suddenly from his crouched position.

"What's with you, Neville?" Ron Weasley asked, amused by Neville's antics.

"My head," Neville said in pained bewilderment, rubbing the spot the hair used to be. "Feels like something was pulling at my hair."

"Maybe it got caught on something on the underside of the table, when you bent over... like a nail or splintering part of the wood," suggested Hermione.

Harry could have kissed her for being so logical. She just didn't have the immediate reaction, like Slytherins did, to suspect people before random chance.

"Huh, maybe," shrugged Neville, and then he went right back to work, botching his potion up more than ever.

Harry grinned as he slid a hand in his pocket to feel the hair, to make sure it was there. He'd be getting that invisibility cloak in no time, and not only could he use it for Quirrell, but he'd have it for his own uses, too.

I hope you guys like Sonia Moon and their plan. :) I think it's cute (and a bit depressing) that Harry only realizes he needs to get some friends so that he can have someone who might take him over the summer. I'm not really planning for Harry to have a best friend any time soon, if ever, but he'll be making connections here and there. Although you never know - I have rough outlines, but for the most part, I just end up writing whatever my characters tell me to. That's the best part about creating personalities; once you've got them made, they practically write themselves!

I don't think it's too much of a stretch to have them be brewing polyjuice in first year, if canon Harry and friends could do it in second! My Harry and Sonia are smarter than that, anyway. Heh. Harry, like young Snape, actually understands why ingredients work together.

Please continue to tell me what you're thinking and giving me suggestions for what you want in the future! Let's shoot for 100 reviews!



## Chapter 9: The Cloak

The frosty month of January jumped joyously into February with the announcement of a blizzard. Quidditch practice was cancelled for the next week, at least, and Harry for one was delighted. He loved flying, of course, but Captain Marcus Flint drove the team way harder than necessary. Harry supposed Flint had a streak to keep up; Slytherin had won the Quidditch cup for the last seven years running.

All the students were cooped up in the castle, so many had taken to going to the library or lounging around the Slytherin common room. Harry liked to people-watch, so it was interesting to see many unfamiliar faces around the school.

He knew he was due for another trip to Professor Quirrell's office, but to be honest, he didn't really want to go. Every time he visited the strange young professor, he left with a splitting headache. That, and often he felt like his information wasn't adequate enough to fulfill the life debt – and he really didn't have much to add this time around.

Harry closed his book with a sigh and slid it into his bag. The Slytherin common room was packed – of the first years, Tracey and Daphne Greengrass were playing chess by the fireplace; Blaise, Theodore Nott, and Draco were busy with a round of Exploding Snap; and Vincent Crabbe was snoring on a couch to their side. Harry noticed with some amusement that some of the boys had charmed a few crude drawings onto Vince's face while he slept.

A flash of golden hair Harry's eye as he glanced around, and he caught sight of Lyrian rather preoccupied with a girl in the corner of the room. Harry took another sneaking glance, a little bit disturbed watching the pair snogging in the corner. He shook his head and made his way out of the portrait hole. As he walked up to Quirrell's office, he supposed that he should have expected that Lyrian could have any girl he wanted... he was a popular kid and someone Harry figured that girls would find devilishly attractive. Harry wondered if they all knew about what he did to his parents; that might be a bit of a turn-off...

Before long he was at Quirrell's door again. He knocked a few times and then waited patiently for the man to come to the door, and while he stood there he heard indistinct shuffling noises coming from within. Actually, Harry thought he could hear voices – one Quirrell's, and the other a much deeper, throatier voice. Odd...

Finally the door swung open, and Harry was greeted with the sight of Professor Quirrell adjusting his turban. "Ah, Potter, do come in..."

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything, Professor," said Harry as he tentatively entered.

"No, no, nothing at all," assured Quirrell quickly. As they sat down in Quirrell's rather plain room, Harry looked around. It didn't seem as if there was anyone else in the area, so he must have imagined the other voice.

"So what news do you have for me about your brother?" began Quirrell, sitting back leisurely.

"Well, I know that he got awarded forty house points for doing some really good transfiguration the other day... oh, and Snape also gave him a detention last week for getting angry at him in class; some of his accidental magic got loose and shattered some of the potion phials," said Harry, remembering the incident.

"Hmm. I expect you to put a little more effort into your duty, Potter, but this information is helpful nonetheless. It seems Eric Potter's magical powers may be growing... and he's potentially getting extra lessons from Dumbledore in core subjects now, perhaps? Unless he's just unusually skilled in transfiguration..." murmured Quirrell.

"Yes. I'm sorry, sir, that this time my information wasn't very good. If what I'm planning works, though, I'll have a very detailed report for next time," promised Harry. "Although, sir, could I ask you a bit of a favor? It's involved with me getting better information, and won't be too much of a hassle."

"I suppose, Potter. What is it?"

“Could you perhaps call Neville Longbottom to meet with you next Thursday afternoon? Fifteen or twenty minutes would be sufficient, maybe to talk to him about his disappointing performance in class, or something along those lines,” suggested Harry.

Quirrell eyed him. “And I assume if I were to ask how this fits into your plans, you’d be... hesitant to answer?”

Harry smiled. Quirrell was implying that he didn’t mind him breaking rules in the name of this ‘research’. If a professor didn’t outright ask, Harry wouldn’t have to reveal that he was breaking the rules. “Yes, sir. But if all goes right, I should be giving some really specific reports to you from now on.”

“Very well, then,” Quirrell agreed. He sat for a moment and then straightened his shoulders. “So, how are you faring with the meditation exercises for Occlumency?”

“Average, I guess,” responded Harry with some hesitation. “There are times when I find it really easy to clear my mind, and then other times I have no luck at all. I suppose I’m just being inconsistent.”

“Well, let us see what you’ve accomplished,” Quirrell suggested, licking his lips slightly. He looked very predatory as he stood up. Harry did the same. “Wand at the ready, Potter. Legilimens!”

For the first time that Harry could remember, his hastily constructed mental walls held up for more than a few seconds. As soon as he was conscious that they were being attacked, Harry frantically fortified them by layering pointless memories behind them. A beam of hope rushed through him – maybe he’d be able to fend Quirrell off this time, he wasn’t in yet, not quite...

But of course it couldn’t last for long. Thirty seconds later, his mind was being ruthlessly barraged by fragments of memory. Eric as a seven-year old, helping Lily to make cookies... Eric giving Uncle Sirius a gigantic bear hug... Eric’s disgusted alarm at seeing Harry unwrap the dark dagger.... There was a pregnant pause in the images and suddenly the subject switched. Harry casting his first dark spell at the dummy... Harry reading the book about dark magic he’d

gotten in Flourish and Blott's... Harry killing the blackbird outside of the Potter house at Christmas....

Abruptly the images stopped and Harry found himself on the floor again, his brain aching.

"I see, Potter," was all Quirrell said, and Harry felt a rising wave of panic within him, starting at his toes and settling somewhere deep in his gut. A professor had seen him do dark magic! He was going to be expelled!

"I... I can explain, sir," stuttered Harry, even though he was unsure if there was any way at all to explain this off.

"No need, Potter. I understand more than you realize," said Quirrell quietly. Harry chanced a look up at the professor. Was he implying that he was a dark wizard, or had done some dark spells, too...?

"Sir?"

"Yes, I am a dark wizard," Quirrell affirmed, his light brown eyes seeming to flash red. "And I do not discourage learning it, as the other professors might. As you may have noticed, I am not so much like them..."

"So," said Harry slowly, "you're saying it's okay for me to keep doing it?" The thought boggled his mind that an authority figure might actually promote use of the dark arts. Harry felt a sudden swell of acceptance – he wasn't alone, not at all.

"Of course. In fact, I can show you some of the more obscure, lesser known aspects of the dark arts, if you'd wish," Quirrell offered, his eyes glimmering. "But you must swear a magical oath now, never to reveal that I am a dark wizard – or else I must obliviate you."

"Oh, yes sir, of course," agreed Harry without missing a beat. The thought of betraying the only adult dark wizard he knew hadn't even crossed his mind.

“Good. I thought you’d agree,” smiled Quirrell, but it was a little crooked. “You’ve tasted the pleasure of dark spells. It is difficult to fathom why anyone would want to stay away from the dark arts, isn’t it?”

Harry gave a short laugh in agreement, although he still could see why others may not like the dark arts. Sure, casting dark spells felt amazing, but they were... well, a little destructive and intrusive, to say the least.

Harry quickly swore a magically binding oath never to tell another about Quirrell being a dark wizard, and then the two continued with more of the Occlumency lesson. Harry had been learning Occlumency for months now, but it was still extremely difficult. He did recognize, however, that he had come a long way since that first time when Quirrell invaded his mind.

When the lesson ended, Quirrell lectured him for a little while about the mechanics of dark magic and then sent him on his way. While excited to be learning something new, Harry was relieved it was over; he, for one, was nursing a pounding headache after that session.

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“Are you sure it’s done?” Harry asked skeptically, peering into the cauldron.

“Yes, Potter,” Sonia replied in a long-suffering voice. “Well, we just have to add the piece of the person and then your notes say it should change color. So, assuming you had the diligence to copy the recipe down right, we should be fine.”

“Yeah I suppose so,” Harry relented. “I think we’ve done everything right. It looks exactly like the book says it should... ghastly.”

As if to prove his point, the thick mud-like substance in the cauldron let off a particularly large bubble.

“So you’ve got the hair?” Sonia asked, watching the potion bubble as if mesmerized. She suddenly turned away from the cauldron, her

expression revolted. “Ugh,” she breathed, “that smells absolutely foul. Give me the hair so we can get this over with.”

Holding his nose in agreement, Harry fished the hair out of the phial he had it in and handed it to her. She scooped bit of the potion out into a cup and then gingerly dropped the hair on the surface. Using a spoon that Harry had nicked from the Great Hall at lunch, she stirred the hair in and Harry was relieved to see the mixture change from a sludgy, goopy stew to a dull orange potion that resembled rotten pumpkin juice.

“Looks delightful, Potter,” she smirked.

“Better than it did a moment ago, anyway,” he pointed out.

“Well then, are you going to drink it?”

“Not yet. I’m waiting until just after defense against the dark arts class. I made a deal with Quirrell so that he’s going to meet with Longbottom after our class ends,” explained Harry.

“You made a deal with a professor about this?” repeated Sonia, surprised. “Oh, well, I guess it’s Quirrell we’re talking about. He’s such a pushover that I bet he’d agree to anything. If you can talk to him through his stutter, that is,” she added insensitively, laughing.

“Er... yeah,” Harry agreed. It was so strange to compare the sputtering, cowardly Professor Quirrell to the confident man that he took Occlumency lessons from. Not for the first time, Harry wondered why Quirrell had to put up the act. Was it so no one would suspect him of being a dark wizard? He shrugged and, after putting a lid on the cup, slipped it into a snug compartment in his bag.

“Let’s stash the cauldron in one of the stalls until we can put the rest into a good container, for later on,” suggested Sonia, and the two of them heaved the pot up and over to a stall in the far corner.

“I’m glad Moaning Myrtle isn’t around to pester us right now,” he said as they set the cauldron down on the ground gently.

“Oh, she was moping about when I came in,” Sonia informed him. Her mouth suddenly formed a somewhat feral smile. “It’s almost too easy to tease her, really. No wonder she was in this bathroom sobbing her eyes out when she died – I really can’t blame her tormentors.”

“You drove her out, again, then?” deduced Harry.

“Yep. It was fun.”

“You’re terrible.”

“Maybe,” she admitted, grinning.

The two of them stood there for a moment, enjoying the feeling of accomplishment that came from brewing a really complex potion for a month. Sure, they weren’t positive they had gotten it right, since it hadn’t been tested, but it had nonetheless been quite the project.

“We’ve got five minutes to get to defense class,” Harry pointed out, glancing at his watch.

“All right. I’m not going to stick around after class, so tell me how it goes, will you? Hopefully everything will go smoothly and the potion won’t make you sprout extra limbs or something...” said Sonia thoughtfully.

“Yeah, thanks for that thought, it was really reassuring,” Harry said sarcastically, shuddering. He really didn’t want to have to go to the hospital wing.

“My pleasure. Now let’s get going,” she said brusquely, and the two set off to class, although they didn’t walk together. Harry was still a little uncomfortable about committing to friendships in public, even if he did enjoy Sonia’s company when they were on their own.

So Harry proceeded to Quirrell’s classroom and took a seat in his usual spot next to Theodore Nott in the front row. The stringy Slytherin boy gave him a bit of a sneer as he took his seat.

“What’re you up to, Potter?” he asked suddenly as Harry sat down.

Harry put on his most innocent face. “What’re you talking about, Nott?”

“You’re sneaking around doing something, I know it. I saw you slink off after lunch today, following Moon,” he accused, his gray eyes flashing.

“What I do in my free time is none of your business, Nott,” responded Harry airily. “Besides, what are you, bored and paranoid? Do you spend your free time stalking everyone that does something you don’t expect?”

“No, just you,” Nott said flatly.

“Because I’m so special, right?”

“Because I don’t think you’re as Slytherin as you want people to believe,” snapped Nott. He lowered his voice. “Dark wizards aren’t raised in light families like yours. You’re a fraud.”

“You just keep thinking that,” Harry replied disinterestedly.

Fortunately Quirrell got the class’s attention soon after that remark, and Nott was forced to be quiet, silently fuming. Harry didn’t understand why the wiry boy was so suspicious of him. He sighed and listened to Quirrell.

“T-t-today we’re going to be studying b-b-banshees. Very... v-very nasty, they are,” commented Quirrell pathetically, dabbing at his brow with a handkerchief. He then turned to the board and began to list out attributes of banshees as the class copied them down. Floor-length black hair, skeletal greenish faces... Harry wished that Quirrell would teach them something useful, besides how to recognize various dark creatures. At least he had his private lessons.

Actually, though, that was the part that bothered him the most; he knew Quirrell was really capable of a lot more than he let on, and he knew Quirrell could be an excellent defense teacher if he actually



tried. Harry stopped copying down the list on the board and instead watched the clock tick by, passing the time by practicing some of his Occlumency meditation. When he got bored in classes he often resorted to trying to clear his mind.

The best part about achieving a decent meditative state was that time seemed to move a lot more quickly. Before he knew it, Quirrell was dismissing the class. As Harry exited the classroom, Quirrell gave him a subtle wink, assuring him that Longbottom was going to be speaking with him this afternoon. Harry grinned nervously and walked out, finding the nearest boys' loo.

He entered the restroom tentatively, scanning to see if there was anyone inside. One stall was occupied, but no one had seen him enter. He slipped into a stall and slid the potion out of his bag, regarding it skeptically. It looked positively vile.

"Here goes nothing," he muttered to himself, and then took two large gulps, almost spitting it out because it tasted like moldy, overcooked cabbage. "Ugh," he breathed.

Immediately, his insides started writhing as though he'd just swallowed live snakes – doubled up, he wondered whether he was going to be sick – then a burning sensation spread rapidly from his stomach to the very ends of his fingers and toes – next, bringing him gasping to cling to the sides of the stall, came a horrible melting feeling, as the skin all over his body bubbled like hot wax.

Before his eyes, his fingers began to thicken, his hips broadened painfully as a larger midsection began to form, and a strange sucking sensation on his head told him that his hair was thinning and becoming a dull brown. His vision suddenly got foggy and Harry became aware that his glasses were no longer necessary. Pulling them off his face, he began to check himself over as the transformation ceased.

His belt squeezed painfully tight on his trousers, so he loosened it and unbuttoned the first button on his shirt to accommodate his broader chest. It was a good thing that Longbottom wasn't too much taller than he was, so that he could still wear his own school clothes.

After adjusting his pants and taking off his robes (he wouldn't want anyone seeing the Slytherin badge) Harry stuffed his outer layers into his bag, along with the potion cup.

So this is what it feels like, being Neville Longbottom, he mused.

Satisfied that he looked okay (well, for Longbottom, that was), he flushed the toilet and made his way out to the sinks, where Dean Thomas of Gryffindor was washing his hands.

"Hey, Neville," said Dean, giving him a smile.

"Er... hi Dean," answered Harry. His voice sounded a little higher pitched and strange to his own ears.

"Why aren't you wearing your robes?" Dean asked as he waited for Harry to finish washing up.

"Spilled some pumpkin juice on them at lunch," lied Harry easily. "I just tried to scourgify them clean, but I messed up the spell and now I'll have to take them to the house elves to get repaired." He tried to manage what he hoped looked like an embarrassed smile.

Dean chuckled. "Nice. Let's get to Gryffindor tower now; we're having our Exploding Snap tournament today, remember?"

Marveling at his luck, Harry followed Dean out. "Oh yeah," he said, "I forgot."

Glad there was someone to lead him up to Gryffindor tower – he knew its general location, but wasn't quite sure about a few turns – he made idle chitchat with Dean on the way up. He felt squatty and bumbling in Neville's body, and he had a hard time trying to imitate the hesitant way Longbottom walked – nothing like his own determined stride.

Before long they stood in front of a painting of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress. Harry was just about to ask Dean what they were doing there when the black boy suddenly said, "Chimera." The

portrait swung to the side and allowed the two boys into what Harry realized was the entrance to the Gryffindor common room.

The Gryffindor common room felt so much, well, friendlier than the Slytherin common room. It was a cozy, round room full of squashy scarlet armchairs, with a crackling fire burning in the hearth. The warmth of the place came as somewhat of a shock to Harry; Slytherin's common room, as it was in the dungeons, was usually rather drafty.

Eric, Ron, and Hermione were sitting on a sofa to the right and Seamus Finnegan was across from them in one of the lumpy armchairs. When Dean and he entered, they all turned to look at the arrivals.

"Hey Dean, hi Neville," Ron greeted them.

"Hey, Ron," said Harry quietly.

"Nev, didn't you have a meeting with Professor Quirrell right now?" Eric asked in confusion.

"Yeah, but it went way faster than I expected," Harry explained. "He just wanted a few words with me."

"Oh, well, brilliant then. Are you going to play in our tournament?"

"Um... I don't think so, I'll just watch," said Harry lamely, but they seemed to accept his answer. He inwardly sighed in relief, glad that Longbottom seemingly wasn't a big fan of the game.

Dean quickly claimed the seat next to Seamus and they all looked to the Exploding Snap board on the table between them. "Right then, so how about Eric versus Hermione first?"

Harry lounged around, watching them play and laughing with the rest when cards exploded in Hermione's face, almost singeing one of her eyebrows off. After a few minutes he stood up suddenly. "I'll be right back, guys. I'm going to get something from the room."

They didn't pay him too much attention as he went to the two spiral staircases and peered up each of them. Fuck. Which one was to the girls' dorms and which one led to the boys'? Picking one at random, he started up the stairs when, very suddenly, they flattened out into a slide. Buzzing alarms reverberated around the common room. He went slipping quickly back down to the bottom, afraid to look up.

Everyone, naturally, was facing him now. "What're you doing trying to get into the girls' side, Neville?" Seamus asked in confusion. The faces around him were similarly bewildered.

Harry's cheeks burned. "Ugh, sorry guys, I must be really out of it. I've a bit of a headache... wasn't even paying attention to where I was going..."

"Do you need to visit Madame Pomfrey, Neville?" Hermione asked, concerned.

"I'll be okay. Thanks, though," said Harry, smiling at her tiredly.

He made his way up the correct staircase this time and found the first year boys' dormitory. Now he just had to find Eric's bed. It ended up being no problem at all; perhaps it was his "twin senses", but Harry immediately made for the second bed from the right and checked around to find a trunk. Sure enough, Eric Potter was inscribed in fancy gold lettering onto the face of the trunk he found.

It was locked, but that was hardly an obstacle. "Alohamora," Harry muttered. The lock sprang open and Harry began sifting through the contents inside, careful not to move things out of place too much.

There it was, at the very bottom. The silky sheen and water-like cloth of Eric's new invisibility cloak shimmered mysteriously in the light. Harry tenderly removed it from the trunk and replaced the contents exactly as they were before. Stuffing it into his school bag, he walked back down the stairs casually.

"I'm really feeling lightheaded, guys," he said, putting a hand to his head. "I think I'll go take a walk to see if it gets better. If not, I'll take your advice, Hermione, and go to Madam Pomfrey."

“Okay, Neville,” smiled Hermione with a concerned look. “I hope you feel better.”

He quickly climbed out of the portrait hole and almost whooped with glee. He had done it – and it had been easy. He had gone into the lion’s den and gotten away with the cloak. Even if Longbottom returned with a contrary story to what had happened, they couldn’t do anything about it – how would they suspect that a first year, Harry Potter, had brewed Polyjuice? That was assuming, of course, that they didn’t just pass off the real Longbottom’s version of things as a result of a headache and being “out of it”. Yeah, Harry had covered his ass, and now he was going to reap the rewards.

He did wonder, though, what Eric would do when he discovered that his cloak was missing.

Whatever. Harry couldn’t find it in himself to care.

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The next night, Friday, Harry decided it was time to have a bit of fun with the cloak. Just as the other Slytherin boys were drifting off to sleep, he grabbed it out of his bag and swung it around his shoulders. He still couldn’t get over the sensation of looking in the mirror and seeing nothing there. I guess this is how vampires feel when they look for their reflection, Harry mused.

Greg Goyle grunted in his sleep. Harry jumped a little bit, and then realized that he shouldn’t be too concerned with one of the boys catching him, now that he had this cloak on...

Suddenly, Harry felt wide-awake. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him in this cloak. Excitement flooded through him as he stood there in the dark and silence. He could go anywhere in this, anywhere, and Filch would never know.

He crept out of the dormitory, across the common room, and exited out of Slytherin dungeons. He knew where he wanted to go – the restricted section in the library. He’d be able to read as long as he

liked, and whatever book he wanted. He set off, drawing the invisibility cloak tight around him as he walked.

The library was pitch-black and very eerie. He stepped carefully over the rope that separated the restriction section from the rest of the library, and then with a rush of excitement he walked down the aisle between the bookshelves. Harry quickly whispered a “lumos” to his wand to light it and then swept the beam across the rows of books. The light looked like it was coming out of nowhere, and even though Harry could feel his wand in his hand, the sight was a little unsettling.

He immediately made a beeline for the section on the dark arts. Reverently, he grabbed a particularly large and ancient-looking tome off of a shelf and opened it up, gently blowing the dust off its pages. It was written in old English and was kind of hard to decipher, but Harry couldn't help but feel that reading this was like learning from the source. Old magic was always the most powerful, and it was as if he had a portal to that knowledge in his very hands.

After a good forty-five minutes of reading that book, Harry decided he should look for another. He found one very large black and silver volume, which he pulled out carefully, because it was very heavy. As soon as he opened it up to a page, a piercing, bloodcurdling shriek split the silence.

The book was screaming.

“Silencio!” Harry hissed, panicking. The book went quiet again, but there was no way that Filch or anyone else would have missed that scream. Harry shoved the book back onto the shelf, threw the cloak on, and ran from the library. He didn't pay attention to where he was going; he just wanted to get as far from the place as possible.

He heard someone's heavy footsteps approaching quickly and looked to his left. A door to what was probably an unused classroom stood ajar, and Harry slipped inside as soundlessly as he could. Watching from the space that the door was open, he watched as, sure enough, Filch hobbled along the corridor. Harry turned around, relieved.

What he saw was definitely not what he was expecting. A magnificent mirror as high as the ceiling stood before him. It had an ornate gold frame and an inscription carved around the top: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

Intrigued, Harry stepped closer to it and took off the cloak. He peered into the mirror, and rather than facing his own reflection, he saw a completely different scene.

A slightly older Harry, perhaps in his early teens, stood on the other side of the mirror. That Harry crackled with an aura of pure magic... pure dark magic, he supposed. The Harry grinned and began casting spells, spells that he had never seen before – spells that looked so complicated and difficult that he couldn't help but be impressed that his older self could manage it.

He looked closer, though, and saw two more faces behind Harry. His parents – but they were wearing expressions that Harry had never seen on them before. They were gazing at their son, Harry, with complete adoration and pride. Not Eric, not the Boy-Who-Lived. They were proud of Harry; they weren't angry that he was a dark wizard; and their gazes were so filled with support and love that he had to look away as his eyes prickled.

He glanced behind him, his vision a bit distorted with the tears in his eyes. As he suspected, there was no one there. Suddenly, though, a thought almost choked him with hope. Could this mirror display the future...?

This was what Harry wanted for himself. No matter how often he might renounce his parents while he was in Slytherin house, he couldn't imagine how whole he would feel if they were there to support him. He didn't want to be the light wizard, the golden kid. He wanted to be himself, but knowledgeable, powerful, and yes, even a dark wizard. But even more, he wanted his parents to accept that. No, not accept that. He wanted them to embrace it.

Harry was so close to the mirror now that his nose was nearly touching that of his reflection. The older Harry winked slyly back at

him. Abruptly Harry started feeling the tingles of anger rising in his veins. This mirror was just a cruel tease, wasn't it?

It could never happen.

Well, he could possibly become the wizard he saw in that reflection, but his parents would never look at him like that. He enjoyed the fact that Eric wasn't even in the picture – served the Gryffindor boy right – but Harry was too much of a realist to believe anything could be that good. Life hadn't been kind to him before; why should it start now?

No, this mirror didn't show the future, but it did show Harry what he really wanted. He suddenly hated it with a passion. How dare it dangle such an attractive vision in front of him! Harry turned on his heel and tossed the cloak back on, sprinting from the room as fast as he could manage.

He hadn't found his bearings yet and was still lost in the castle, but somehow that didn't concern him as he wandered through the corridors. His mind still lingered on that damn mirror.

He hated it. Yet as much as he hated it, he had to use all the self-control he possessed not to turn back.

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Albus Dumbledore was deeply concerned. Saturday afternoon, Eric Potter had come to him for his leadership lessons as usual. However, when the boy indeed entered his office, he was presented with another matter altogether.

"Professor Dumbledore, sir, I think someone's stolen my new invisibility cloak," said Eric, the panic in his voice evident.

Dumbledore stopped and faced the boy sharply. "The one your father gave to you for Christmas?" Eric nodded. "And you're sure you haven't misplaced it yourself?" he asked.



“Completely sure, sir,” said Eric miserably. “The thing that bothers me the most is that I haven’t told anyone about it besides Ron and Hermione.”

Dumbledore began to pace in his office. “No one else knows about its existence?”

“Well, just my family, obviously, since I got it from my Mum and Dad. Sirius and Remus and... Harry... were there,” finished Eric slowly. “But Harry couldn’t have stolen it from Gryffindor tower, right?”

“Nothing is impossible...” said Dumbledore evenly. His piercing blue eyes were grave, and his wrinkles seemed more pronounced than ever. “Why is it that you never got along with Harry, Eric?”

“I don’t know, sir. He was never as much fun as my other friends. Always brooding and quiet, and when we were really young he cried way more,” suggested Eric. His hazel eyes were troubled. The old wizard was silent for a long moment, making the time stretch uncomfortably.

“I’m greatly disappointed in him,” sighed Dumbledore. “I wish I wouldn’t have to suspect him for the theft, but considering his past actions...” The aged wizard trailed off in thought.

“Come, Eric. Let us not worry about the situation right now. Your leadership magic lessons are more important. Rest assured, though; I will look into this matter further.”

Eric looked as if he’d rather go searching for Harry right away, but reluctantly he agreed. Dumbledore began to lecture Eric on a spell to increase the charismatic effect of his words, but the old wizard’s mind was elsewhere.

He wasn’t sure how young Harry could have managed to steal the cloak, but he’d certainly be investigating the matter. The Slytherin boy was concerning him more and more as the year went on.

DunDunDUN.

While Harry figured that there were a good number of ways that the theft could be traced to Neville's strange behavior that day, he never really considered that Eric would have kept the cloak secret. So now he's target number one, and not expecting it at all! Eep. xD

Please review. I'd love you (-\-\-\-\-\-\-\) that much more!

## Chapter 10: Sneaking By

Approximately seventy percent of the time, Severus Snape hated being head of Slytherin house. Not only did the snotty little first-year Slytherins traditionally come whining to him, homesick, but he was also assigned a load of extra responsibilities (and paperwork) that usually ended up being more of a burden than a privilege.

But about thirty percent of the time, Severus Snape enjoyed the power that being head of house gave him. Even though the popular Slytherin students liked to believe they ran the place, he was the one behind the scenes who could twist anything to his desires. And that was attractive. Oh, yes, it was very attractive.

But this was one of those times within the seventy percent range. Dumbledore, the old coot, had come to him requesting that he, as the boy's head of house, find out if Harry Potter had stolen his brother's invisibility cloak. And of course, Snape, being Snape, caved in whenever the headmaster required something of him. Severus, please, the aged wizard would say to him, and his blue eyes would flash as if reprimanding a child, and there'd be no doubt that even though Snape might complain, he'd agree in the end.

Manipulative old sod, thought Snape viciously as he chopped up a flobberworm for his next potion. He must have done a hell of a job convincing the hat not to put him in Slytherin.

He was planning to keep the boy after potions class this morning to have a bit of a chat with him. And by chat, he meant use Legilimency on the kid. Personal privacy be damned, Snape wasn't going to make this job any more difficult than it needed to be.

Snape brushed his lank, greasy hair out of his face and then gathered up his materials, placing them carefully in the correct jars and bins in his storeroom. He then strode back to the front of his classroom and began to pace while he waited for the students to arrive.

Before long, the heavy door creaked open and Draco Malfoy entered, flanked by Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle. The blond boy's

glacial gray eyes sought Snape out, and he smiled. "Hello Professor," said Draco amiably.

"Good morning, Mr. Malfoy," replied Snape. Draco was a competent potions student, and Snape had been to Malfoy Manor more than once over the year for meetings with Lucius, so Snape supposed that Draco saw him as a sort of uncle. Snape wasn't particularly good at endearing himself to people, but he could tolerate the boy, and that much could not be said for many of the children his age.

"Father's going to be writing to you soon," said Draco as he sat down. Crabbe and Goyle sat down at his sides.

"Oh?" said Snape absently, though he was curious as to why. Although he and Lucius had maintained an on-and-off correspondence over the years, he still never expected it when he was contacted.

"Yes, he mentioned it in his last letter to me," explained Draco. They all looked to the back of the room as the door creaked open again and this time Eric Potter, surrounded by a gaggle of Gryffindors, entered the classroom.

Snape hated that Potter boy with a passion. It was true that he didn't look nearly as much like James as his twin did, but nonetheless he had inherited James' infuriating personality. The boy's brown hair shimmered a deep red color occasionally in the dim lighting of the dungeons, and Snape was sharply reminded of Lily. Eric Potter had Lily's soft facial structure, but the delicacy of his features was offset by a strong nose and playful hazel eyes – James' eyes.

Snape inwardly growled and turned away from the Gryffindor bunch to look back at the Slytherins. Harry Potter had just come into the classroom, talking quietly to Sonia Moon. He took his usual seat, however, in the front of the classroom next to Theodore Nott. His eyes were downcast, and he remained silent, just sitting there and staring at a point on the table.

Finally the second hand of the clock reached exactly nine-thirty, and Snape spoke up. "Today you're to brew minor Pepper-up potions.

These take three days to make, so at the end of class you will be required to place your labeled cauldrons on the shelves to your right to sit until tomorrow.”

He paused as Hermione Granger’s hand shot up into the air like a rocket.

“Yes, Miss Granger?” drawled Snape, wearing an extremely irritated expression.

“Will we be making the variation with billywig stingers, or using the regular recipe?” she asked earnestly.

“The regular condensed version, Miss Granger, and if you could have contained your know-it-all urge to show off for just a moment more, the recipe would have been written on the board, and your question answered,” said Snape snarkily. Hermione visibly drooped, although the Slytherins appeared generally delighted that she’d been taken down a peg.

“Here are your instructions,” said Snape, flicking his wand at the board, “You are to work in pairs.”

Ron Weasley and Eric Potter immediately looked to each other happily. Snape caught the exchange out of the corner of his eye. “Ah, I think not, Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter,” he added, smirking. “I’ll be choosing your partners.”

A collective groan issued from the class. Snape felt immediately satisfied. Serves the brats right.

Down the class list he went, often pairing Gryffindors with Slytherins. When he got to ‘Potter, Eric’ he had a wonderfully good idea.

“Eric Potter, with Harry Potter,” he assigned. Instantly both boys looked uncomfortable and angry, and Snape noticed Eric Potter whispering furiously to Ron Weasley, every so often casting death glares in Snape’s direction.

“Do you have a problem, Mr. Potter?” asked Snape icily.

Eric scowled. "No," he looked up, as Snape seemed to be waiting for more. "...sir."

Snape's eyebrows rose and he continued along the list, ending with Blaise Zabini paired with Parvati Patil. He regarded the students for a moment after he finished reading the names. "Well then, why aren't you getting to work?" he snapped.

Harry Potter reluctantly collected some of the ingredients and made his way over to where his brother was sitting obstinately. Snape began to pace around the classroom as the students got started. Snape always enjoyed the disputes that came of pairing Gryffindors with Slytherins, and this time was no exception.

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"I know you did it," Eric whispered savagely to Harry as he measured a cup of Ashwinder scales.

Harry stilled for the briefest of seconds. How the hell could Eric know it was him? "Did what?" he asked, adopting an unconcerned expression.

"You stole my invisibility cloak," hissed Eric out of the corner of his mouth. Snape was coming near them so they immediately went silent. Harry grabbed a bowl and poured the scales into it as he squeezed some paste on top. He then started to whip the ingredients together, waiting until Snape was across the room before he opened his mouth again to defend himself.

"How the hell would I even go about stealing your stupid cloak?"

"I don't know, but it had to have been you," said Eric flatly. They both stopped preparing their ingredients and stared each other down.

"Come off it, Eric," snapped Harry. "You're just accusing me because, oh, it obviously must be Harry! I just fuck everything up in your life, right, so it must be me again!"

There was a part of Harry that felt a little bad for saying this when he did, in fact, take the cloak, but it wasn't a very big part. Lying was coming easier to him these days, anyway. That, and he really did want to explode at Eric.

"Yeah, that's right!" snarled Eric. "And you're in for it, too. I told Dumbledore, and he thinks you did it as well."

Cold dread began to seep through Harry. Shit. He didn't stand a chance of hiding the theft from the faculty, especially the headmaster. Not to mention that the headmaster was suspicious of Harry already....

"Get to work, brothers Potter," barked Snape as he sauntered past them. The two immediately looked away from one another and set to work again.

Even while Harry was distracted trying to figure out how to weasel his way out of this situation, he had to admit that he and Eric made quite a good potions pair when they weren't bickering at each other. Eric was a diligent potion-maker, and while he didn't have the deeper understanding that Harry did of the ingredients, he made very few manual errors when following the directions.

Harry absently wondered what Eric's potions grade was like. He did good work, but he suspected that Snape might grade him more harshly than some of the other students. He knew that Snape was itching to mark down his own work, but he always did an indisputably superior job.

"What're you doing?" Eric suddenly demanded. Harry was adding the liquefying solution before the mixture of ingredients rather than after. "Are you trying to sabotage our potion?"

"Oh, shut it, Eric," sighed Harry, annoyed. "If you knew anything about Ashwinder scales, you'd understand that they're very delicate when they're combined to an acidic solution, and it preserves them better when they're added to the solution gently. So it obviously wouldn't be best to go splashing it on top of it afterwards."

Eric seemed to have momentarily forgotten that he was angry at Harry. “Really? How d’you know all that?” he asked in fascination.

“I read,” replied Harry empathetically.

Eric glowered at him. “Well so do I, but I wouldn’t have remembered all that,” he said sourly.

Harry just shrugged and turned back to their cauldron. There were more important things for him to be thinking about than a stupid potion. Namely, how to keep the theft of the cloak a secret. As he continued along the ingredient list, he started to work on his meditation. He needed to keep Dumbledore and everyone else out of his mind; that was the key. Hoping his months of Occlumency training would be enough, he worked hard on creating a mental shield.

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Severus Snape watched impassively as the students scurried about, trying to get their cauldrons ready to store for tomorrow’s class. There were only a couple minutes left of the class period and while a few groups, such as Hermione Granger and Daphne Greengrass, had finished early, most of the class was frantically attempting to complete the day’s work in time.

He watched as Harry Potter carried his cauldron leisurely to the shelf and set it on it gently, charming the name ‘Potter’ onto the label below. Snape had to admit that he was impressed with what a natural the boy was as a potion-maker. In some respects, he reminded Snape of himself when he was a student – always one to come up with a perfect potion by meddling with the standard directions. He’d caught how Potter had added the liquefying solution before the Ashwinder paste... he just didn’t expect a student as young as a first year to have such insight.

And yet at the same time, it made him even angrier. Why the fuck did the next potions prodigy have to be, of all people, James Potter’s son?



The bell rang and students started to exit the classroom. Snape was amused to see Eric Potter give his brother a dirty look as he walked to the back of the room with his friends. Just as Harry Potter was turning to leave as well, Snape spoke up. "Potter, I'd like you to stay after class."

Harry turned on his heel and walked back to his seat, sitting down again, not saying a word. He didn't even acknowledge the professor with a glance while he waited patiently for the room to empty of students.

Neville Longbottom (and his partner Vincent Crabbe) took an exceptionally long time to get their cauldron ready to put on the back shelf, and by the time they'd exited it was a full ten minutes after class had officially ended. Meanwhile, Harry Potter simply sat, appearing as if he was either zoning out or very deep in thought.

"So Potter, as your head of house, I'm entrusted with a variety of tasks relating to my students," began Snape as he started to walk around the room. "And this time the headmaster believed that I should be in charge of finding out if you stole an object from your endearing Gryffindor brother."

Potter didn't say anything, and his gaze didn't waver from a random point on the wall.

"I admit; this still strikes me as a family affair that really isn't worth meddling in by outsiders. I knew, of course, that Potters constantly debase themselves with such terrible conduct, but never did I expect I'd have to mediate such a dispute," said Snape, smirking. He continued to circle slowly around the classroom. "So Potter, I will ask – are you the thief?"

"You still haven't said what it is that I'm accused of stealing, sir."

The boy spoke quietly and he still didn't look at Snape. Snape was starting to get annoyed – he wanted Potter to get angry, or respond in some way to Snape's words, but instead the boy remained callous and calm.

“Your twin’s invisibility cloak, Potter,” spat Snape as he drew closer to the young Slytherin’s seat. “Did you steal it?”

“No.”

“Words aren’t good enough, Potter. Look at me,” he demanded. Harry turned his head and for the briefest of moments his brilliant green eyes caught Snape’s, but then he was staring slightly off, at Snape’s cheeks and nose.

Snape desperately wanted to use Legilimency but needed eye contact at the very least. He was a master at Occlumency, but his Legilimency skills were only about average. There were some, like the Dark Lord, who could initiate strong Legilimency with the barest of glances; Snape needed longer than that.

“Look me in the eyes, Potter. Unless you have a mental deficiency and you forgot where they were?” barked Snape.

“Why, professor?” asked Potter softly.

“Why?” repeated Snape. “It’s a measure of respect, you fool! Now look me in the eyes!”

Ever so reluctantly, Potter’s intense green eyes slid up to meet his own. Snape began the Legilimency as soon as he could, but he found himself stymied right away. The boy had a significant mental shield. What in Salazar’s name...?

“So, Professor Snape, now that I’ve shown you the proper respect, is there anything else you’d like to ask me? I already said I didn’t steal the cloak,” said Potter in a maddeningly serene voice.

Eye-contact Legilimency wasn’t nearly as strong as Legilimency with the spellcast. If Snape wanted to get past the mental shield, he’d need to use the spoken spell. It was risky to do that, though; if the boy ever put the memory in a pensieve, or was mind-read by another, Snape would be found out. And Snape knew that the Board of Governors – or for that matter, anyone else besides Dumbledore –

would be horrified to witness such an obvious, unprovoked mental intrusion on a student.

Snarling, Snape stopped attempting to use Legilimency on the boy and instead regarded him grumpily. “No, Potter, I believe that will be all...”

“Goodbye, then, sir,” said Potter, and with that, he made his way out of the classroom.

After he left, Snape grabbed a nearby flask and threw it hard against the wall, where it impacted with a sharp shatter. “Fucking Potter in Slytherin...” he hissed. After a few long moments he finally collected himself, repaired the flask quickly with his wand, and went into his storeroom to find some plimpy eggs to mash. He always felt better after destroying something, and it would be useful for his potions later, too.

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About a week had passed since Harry’s confrontation with Snape, and he was feeling decidedly good about the matter altogether. Snape had been especially cruel to him lately, but no matter what he did, the man couldn’t yet find a way to get Harry to confess about the cloak.

Harry was actually quite proud of himself. When he had been sitting in the potions classroom awaiting questioning, he’d been practicing his Occlumency meditation with more determination than he ever had before. Then, when he was finally forced to look into the man’s pitiless black eyes, his shield had held up. He had done it!

He thought that his success might have been partially due to the fact that Quirrell would use the spoken cast version of Legilimency on him, while Snape resorted exclusively to eye-contact Legilimency. Despite that, he was feeling pretty good about himself. If he kept up with his practice, he could be an Occlumency expert in a few years – something unheard of for someone his age.

Then again, Harry supposed that eleven-year-olds weren't often taught Occlumency in the first place. Still, he wouldn't let that detail prevent himself from being happy with himself.

Now, though, he had to use the cloak to follow Eric and see what he was up to. He owed it to Quirrell, and he wouldn't fail him now – not after all that work.

So that Friday afternoon, once classes were done, he decided he'd find Eric. He knew that last period on Friday the Gryffindors had Herbology with the Hufflepuffs, so he made his way to the greenhouses as quickly as he could manage once his Charms class was done. Sure enough, he heard Ron's voice echoing down the next corridor, and he quickly draped the cloak over him, knowing that where there was Ron, Eric was bound to be nearby.

"... so then the Chudley Cannons signed on this new keeper, Randall Starington, and he's a trade from the Wimbourne Wasps. Well, he was actually one of their reserves for a long time, but he's recently begun to show a lot of promise and the Cannons decided to pick him up before he became first-seed keeper," Ron was explaining to Eric.

"He was a reserve?" said Eric. Ron nodded. "Has he ever actually played in a professional game, then?"

"Well, no, but it's the potential we're concerned with, Eric, the potential," Ron repeated, and Harry suspected he was trying to convince himself more than Eric.

Harry fought the urge to snort with laughter. Ron was a devoted fan of probably the worst professional Quidditch team out there, but he didn't seem to care all. He remembered when he was younger and Ron would come over to play with Eric. If they ever got to talking about Quidditch, Ron would always insist that this was the year! And yet the Cannons hadn't won the league since 1892. Furthermore, their motto had seriously switched in 1972 to "let's all just keep our fingers crossed and hope for the best", so Harry didn't think they had much going for them recently, either.

Seriously, sometimes Harry wondered what it was about people that made them blindly loyal to a cause. Did they not consider the facts? Did they not think? Maybe it was just a Slytherin thing to analyze a situation and go for the most logical choice. If that were true, then he was doubly glad he was sorted into the house of serpents.

“So are you up for a bit of practice tonight, then?” Ron offered as they walked down the hall.

“I can’t, Ron. I promised Professor McGonagall I’d meet with her on Fridays at four o’ clock from now on for extra lessons. Sorry, mate,” he explained, and he did indeed seem apologetic.

Hermione, who had been walking beside them silently until now, finally spoke up. “I think that’s great, Eric. I wish I could come with you, though... it’s so unfair that you get to learn all these additional things!”

“I’d gladly switch places with you, if you’d like to defeat Voldemort,” said Eric darkly.

That shut Hermione up. “I’m sorry, Eric, I didn’t mean that I wanted to be in your shoes... I just—”

“—it’s okay, Hermione, really. I know you just like to learn anything you possibly can,” relented Eric, sighing. “I’m just frustrated because it takes up so much of my time. And I’m just a kid. How can everyone expect me to be some superhero when I just need to grow up, first?”

It’s your duty to our world, thought Harry viciously in response. That should be reason enough – that you’re the only one who can do it, and the longer you take, the more people might die.

“There’s something I just don’t quite understand, Eric,” said Hermione, shaking her head. “How do you even know that You-Know-Who is going to return?”

“Well, what my parents have told me is that after I bounced back his killing curse, Dumbledore went researching. Because there was no body, you see, Dumbledore suspected that he wasn’t quite done for.

He found all sorts of people, like the old head of Slytherin house – Slughorn, I think his name was – and discovered that Voldemort had taken a bunch of steps to ensure that he couldn't die like a normal person,” explained Eric. “So he's out there somewhere – weak, probably, and biding his time until he can return...”

Ron shuddered. “I hope he waits a long time for your sake, mate.”

“Yeah, me too,” breathed Eric. His voice was tight with anxiety. Harry allowed himself to feel bad for his twin for a moment. He did have a tough road ahead of him.

On the other hand, Harry couldn't believe his luck. Though he had hoped that Eric might be heading to a lesson with Dumbledore like he had last weekend, he hadn't even known that he'd have a lesson with McGonagall in just a few minutes! Excited, Harry kept following them – at a safe distance, of course.

Finally Eric parted from Ron and Hermione and headed to the transfiguration classroom. Harry followed him in and stood near the door, checking to make sure he was completely covered by the cloak. He tried to keep his breathing as quiet as possible – the classroom was silent, and if he made too much noise he could be easily discovered. And how much fun would that be? Not only would he be discovered spying on Eric, he'd be caught with the cloak.

Harry swallowed and did his best to keep his thoughts from going in that direction. Fortunately, Eric strode over to McGonagall, who was sitting at her desk, and the conversation between the two distracted him and held his attention.

“I'm here, professor,” announced Eric.

“Oh, good, Mr. Potter. Thank you for coming,” replied McGonagall in a very business-like fashion. Her graying hair was pulled back into a tight bun and, as usual, she looked as severe as she actually was.

“As I'm sure Professor Dumbledore told you, I'm going to be tutoring you for the rest year in transfiguration as well as other core subjects. Now I know that you're already an able student as it is, but a little

more preparation couldn't hurt," she reasoned. Eric nodded and waited patiently at her side.

"Wand out, Mr. Potter. I'm going to be teaching you how to transfigure a mouse into a snuffbox. Now we normally do this at the very end of the first year, but we have to accelerate your learning, so this won't be easy," warned McGonagall.

Harry suddenly became extremely glad that he had obtained the cloak. This way, not only could he spy on Eric, but he could learn what Eric did! Well, he could learn from McGonagall, anyway; he was a little bit more suspicious about Dumbledore. For some reason, he thought the powerful headmaster might be able to detect that there was someone else invisible in the room.

Eric worked at transforming the mouse into the snuffbox for a decent half-hour, and then when his snuffbox was at least somewhat up to par, McGonagall moved on to the next thing. Harry listened with rapt attention and made note of all of her suggestions. As soon as he got out of the classroom and in a safe area, he was going to give these a try himself, if he could, that was; finding a mouse might prove difficult.

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On the third Saturday in February, Harry walked out to the Quidditch pitch amidst a large crowd of students who were going to see the Hufflepuff versus Gryffindor game. He'd be rooting for Hufflepuff, of course – Slytherin traditionally sided with Ravenclaw, but since the eagles wouldn't be playing in this game, they had no choice but to support whatever house was against their rival.

The weather had shifted from snowstorm to rain rather suddenly, in Harry's opinion, and now the pitch was drenched with puddles. Fortunately, the sky was clear, if a little moisture-filled, so the ground being wet wasn't too much of an issue for a game played in the air. Harry climbed up to the Slytherin stands where he found the group of first years casting warming charms on themselves.

He took a seat between Draco Malfoy and Tracey Davis, and stared out to the pitch, where he caught sight of Eric out in his scarlet Quidditch robes with the rest of the Gryffindor team.

“What the hell? Why’s Snape officiating?” asked Harry suddenly as he noticed that his head of house was out there on the field as well, wearing the traditional referee robes.

“Didn’t you hear?” drawled Draco, “For some reason Snape signed up to be referee. Maybe he wants to ensure Gryffindor loses, eh?”

“Yeah,” Pansy Parkinson chimed in. “There’s no way Gryffindor can win if he biases the game in Hufflepuff’s favor. Let’s just hope your stupid brother doesn’t catch the Snitch – that’d botch it right up.”

Harry shrugged and watched as Snape blew the whistle and the game began. He tried to ignore Tracey scooting closer to him so that her arm lightly touched his, and instead focused on what the seekers were doing. There was no better time to scout out good tactics than watching his opponents in a match.

Cedric Diggory was the Hufflepuff seeker. He was a charismatic fourth-year student who trained hard and had earned the title of Quidditch Captain starting this year. He had more experience in games than Eric did, obviously, but he was heavier and Harry wasn’t sure he had as much natural talent as Eric.

Eric, meanwhile, was circling the pitch at a high elevation, staying out of the fray of chasers below him. He nimbly swooped around the goal posts and then dipped low, next circling around the lower half of the field. His broom seemed to be doing perfectly fine, now – no trace of the bucking and twitching it had displayed on its last game.

The Slytherins all cheered as Snape awarded Hufflepuff a penalty because George Weasley had hit a bludger at him. The rest of the houses regarded them dirtily because of the cheers, except for Hufflepuff who paid them no heed whatsoever. While the hard-working, loyal, and true house wasn’t known for accepting anything unfair, that didn’t seem to stop them from letting something go when it was to their advantage.



“You know how I think they choose people for the Gryffindor team?” said Draco a few minutes later, as Snape awarded Hufflepuff another penalty for no reason at all. “It’s people they feel sorry for. See, there’s Potter, who’s destined to defeat a dark lord, then there’s the Weasleys, who’ve got no money. You know, Longbottom should be on the team – he’s got no brains.”

The Slytherins broke out laughing in agreement, until suddenly gasps and cheers came from the crowd. Harry craned his neck to see Eric Potter go into a spectacular dive. “Oh no,” Tracey murmured at his side, as Eric streaked toward the ground like a bullet.

The cheers from the Gryffindor section grew even louder as the fans leapt to their feet to watch as Eric sped straight at Snape. Up in the air, Snape turned on his broomstick just in time to see something scarlet shoot past him, missing him by inches – the next second, Eric had pulled out of the dive, his arm raised in triumph, the Snitch clasped in his hand.

The stands erupted – the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs in disgust and dismay, and the rest of the school in joy. It had to be a record; no one could ever remember the Snitch being caught so quickly.

Poor Cedric Diggory hadn’t had a chance. He was on the opposite side of the field when Eric had spotted the Snitch, and there was no way he could have made it over in time to catch up with the Gryffindor boy. Harry felt sorry for him.

He supposed his parents would be glad to hear that their prized child had won a Quidditch match in record time. That other child – oh yeah, their son Harry – had obviously spoiled their son’s first game, so it was only natural that Eric would make this one especially memorable.

Harry sighed and got up with the rest of the students, making his way back to the castle. He was near the tail end of the crowd, and as he marched slowly up the hill, he caught sight of Snape rushing by. What the hell was he doing?

Harry turned from the path, crept behind the stands, and dug the invisibility cloak out of his bag from when he'd used it the night before. He tossed it on, making sure that no one was looking, but he needn't have worried; almost everyone was already inside the castle now. He walked back out and scanned the pitch for Snape. At first, he thought he'd lost sight of him, when he suddenly noticed a hooded figure.

Clearly not wanting to be seen, it walked as fast as possible toward the forbidden forest. He recognized the person's prowling walk. It was Snape, sneaking into the forest while everyone else was at dinner – what was going on?

Harry took off following the man, trying to be as light on his feet as possible. It would be a disaster to step into a puddle and catch his attention. When he entered the forest, soon the trees were so thick that he couldn't see where Snape had gone.

Abruptly he heard the shuffle of leaves and he looked into a shadowy clearing where Snape stood, but he wasn't alone. Quirrell was there, too. Harry couldn't make out the look on his face, but he was stuttering worse than ever. Harry strained to catch what they were saying.

"... d-don't know why you wanted t-t-to meet me here of all p-places, Severus..."

"Oh, I thought we'd keep this private," said Snape, his voice icy. "Students aren't supposed to know about the Sorcerer's Stone, after all."

The Sorcerer's Stone? Harry wondered silently. What's that? Whatever it was, he obviously wasn't supposed to be privy to that information.

Harry leaned forward. Quirrell was mumbling something. Snape interrupted him.

"Have you found out how to get past that beast of Hagrid's yet?"

"B-b-but Severus, I –"

Just then, an owl hooted loudly nearby, and Harry jumped, startled.

“What was that?” snapped Snape, checking over the area wildly. The sun was setting, though, so the forest was getting quite dark and Snape probably wouldn’t be able to see him even if he weren’t invisible.

“Show yourself!” bellowed Snape, his dark eyes wide. He looked positively mad.

Quirrell whimpered. Harry stood as still as possible, hardly daring to breathe, afraid that the movement of his rising and falling chest would attract their attention.

“P-p-perhaps it was j-just an animal, Severus,” offered Quirrell meekly. “We are in a f-f-forest, after... after all.”

“I know damn well where we are, thank you very much,” snarled Snape. He scanned the clearing one last time and then turned back to Quirrell. “Very well. We’ll have another little chat soon, Quirrell.”

He threw his cloak over his head and strode out of the clearing. Quirrell followed a few moments later. It was almost completely dark now, but Harry waited for a long while before he felt it was safe for him to leave. When he did, he rushed through the forest in a sprint, fearful. The words of Ronan the centaur, about the magical creatures disliking him because of his wand core, were running through his mind. Naturally, he wasn’t too keen on finding out how true they were.

Squee! So there it is. If you liked it or if you have any thoughts about the story/chapter, tell me so!

The next chapter might take a little longer than usual in coming out since I'm going to be busy in a sports competition for the next few days, but I'll be back - don't you worry. Much love. ((heart))

## Chapter 11: Of Dragons and Duels

Harry flipped through a large tome titled *A Study of Recent Developments in Wizardry*, searching for information on the Sorcerer's Stone. Passing through the section of developments starting with 'S', he sighed heavily and closed it with a thud. None of the books he'd looked through had offered him any information on the subject – not even a passing mention.

He stood up and stretched out, his back cracking, and then collected his belongings to leave the library. There wasn't usually a limit on how long he could spend in a library without getting bored, but this was just mindless searching. He could read for hours about an intriguing topic, but sorting systematically through encyclopedias... well, it wasn't exactly his idea of enthralling.

It was now the third week of March and finally the weather was becoming a little more tolerable. The grounds were still quite wet, but the rainstorms were now often punctured by periods of patchy sunshine and then clouds. Harry peered out a window that faced the Quidditch pitch, watching the Ravenclaw team at practice. Their chasers were exceptionally good this year, he noticed, as one made a particularly fantastic shot. Looking away again, he checked his watch and started to stroll up to the Room of Requirement to be early for his appointment with Lyrian at two o'clock.

The castle was bustling with students of all ages in the halls. He passed a group of fourth year Hufflepuff boys laughing at one of the portraits, and he saw Fred and George Weasley entertaining some Gryffindor second years with a joke potion that made the drinker speak backwards for hours. It seemed that the Slytherins didn't often roam the halls as much as the other houses; during his trip up to the seventh floor, Harry only noticed a pair of seventh year Slytherin girls strolling quietly to the Great Hall.

Upon reaching his destination, he stopped at wall across from the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy and paced back and forth, wishing for the usual classroom he had with Lyrian to appear. On the third pass, the door materialized. He turned the knob and entered, feeling immediately at home in the familiar room.

The targets were there as usual. Harry quickly muttered the charm he had learned from Lyrian to make them zoom around in the air, so that while he waited for Lyrian to arrive, he could practice his aim and his aura-seeing ability. He was getting rather good at it now that he'd done it a few times. He was so focused on hitting the targets that he didn't even notice it when he heard a voice behind him.

"You're getting quite good, you know. Much better than I was when I first started," praised Lyrian, smirking. "Then again, I didn't start training until I was twelve or thirteen. The defense against the dark arts teacher in my second year was really into dueling, and he got me fascinated with it as well."

Harry jumped at first, not having heard Lyrian enter, but then a warm glow of pride erupted in his stomach. That was one of the things he liked most about training with Lyrian. The older boy always let him know when he was doing well – something he heard precious little of while growing up. Even the teachers these days in his classes seemed to expect a high level of performance out of him, so after the first few weeks they stopped mentioning how well he'd done. It had simply become the norm for him to exceed expectations.

"Now that you've got a bit more experience in aim and aura-reading, why don't we have a quick duel?" Lyrian suggested.

"With you?" exclaimed Harry. "You'll probably knock me out; there's no way I'll stand a chance."

"I'll go easy until you get a little better, if you insist," drawled Lyrian, his golden hair shining in the light.

"Well, don't go easy," said Harry with a wince. He didn't like anyone thinking he was weak. "Just don't use deadly spells, okay?"

"Fine," relented Lyrian, flicking the hair out of his eyes in annoyance.

As if on cue, a classic dueling strip formed itself out of the floor of the Room of Requirement, and Lyrian moved to one end. Harry, taking the hint, made his way to the opposite side.

"I haven't ever dueled anyone before," he admitted a little embarrassedly.

"No matter. You'll learn fast," grinned Lyrian sadistically, and before Harry could say anything, he charmed numbers in the air to start counting down – 3, 2, 1, duel!

"Distraho!" cried Lyrian immediately. Harry deftly dodged the yellow light that whizzed by his head, idly wondering what spell it was. Before he could start to fight back, Lyrian shot another spell at him. "Terrere mentus!"

Just barely getting out of the way of that spell, Harry quickly fired a spell of his own. "Locomotor mortis!"

Lyrian conjured a shield and the spell bounced off harmlessly. Harry couldn't even hear the next spells that Lyrian fired his way because the boy kept his voice low, but it didn't end up mattering to him much. He was more focused on dodging the curses than using countercharms and anti-jinxes.

The two continued like that for a few more minutes when Harry finally became too tired of dodging spells and, exhausted, got hit by a particularly strong "Petrificus totalus" from Lyrian. He fell back, paralyzed, and registered his back feeling sore from the impact on the floor but being able to do nothing about it.

Lyrian appeared in his vision a moment later. "You really need to learn shield charms," he noted with a smirk. "You're fairly quick but you can't rely on dodging everything."

Harry blinked in what he hoped was a very angry fashion.

"Oh fine, I'll release you," Lyrian rolled his eyes and muttered the countercharm. Harry felt instantaneously much more in control of his body, and he couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

"Teach me the shield charm, then," said Harry resolutely, his green eyes rebellious.

"It's a fifth year charm, you know," commented Lyrian. His demeanor was casual, although a twinge in his voice was almost daring Harry to back down at the warning.

"All the better reason to start learning early then," quipped Harry, grinning impishly. Lyrian's lips curled into a satisfied smirk, and he began to show Harry the wand motion.

For a while the two practiced shield charms, but Harry wasn't having any luck. He'd manage just a poof of a shield out of his wand and then it would flicker and disappear. Even Lyrian was getting a little frustrated with the lack of progress, so after a good fifteen minutes they switched back to doing dark magic.

"You're more of a natural with dark spells than anything, I think," mused Lyrian. "That's the only thing you've done consistently well within the first few tries. Take the jinx I taught you last time, for example. That's definitely something that no one under fourth year would even dream of learning, but you managed it perfectly on the third try. And yet when you're confronted with shield charms and other light spells, you're just as incompetent as the next first year."

Harry wasn't quite sure whether to feel offended or pleased at Lyrian's words, and he settled instead for a smile that perhaps was a bit like a grimace. They set to back to work.

Harry loved the feeling of casting dark spells. It filled his whole body with joy, tingling with a kind of burning release. After casting one dark spell and experiencing a particularly strong surge of pleasure, he had to know why it felt that way.

"Why does dark magic feel so..." Harry started to ask, searching for the right word.

"Amazing? Euphoric?" offered Lyrian, his bright eyes glinting.

"Yeah," agreed Harry, sighing happily.

"Dark magic is stronger and purer than light magic. It is true that while the difference between light, gray, and dark magic is often about the

intention of the caster, there is still a basic change in the mechanics of the spellcast when the spell is going to be dark,” explained Lyrian, pacing around the room.

Harry listened, his sharp green eyes locked onto the older boy. “How so?”

“You can use most light spells for any old thing. When you use dark spells, though, you have to be completely committed to your goal for it to work right. And when you make such a connection with your magic and willpower, the strongest and rawest forms of your magic are dredged up from your magical core.”

“So why don’t really powerful light spells have the same result?” asked Harry.

“Well, to some extent, they do,” admitted Lyrian. “But most light wizards and witches don’t ever get to that level of magic. The kind of stuff that Dumbledore did to defeat Grindelwald – involving the most powerful ancient light spells – probably gave him a sensation of pleasure from having so much raw magic run through him.”

“So you’d say that dark magic is just easier, then?”

“Yes and no. For you and me, it’s definitely easier, of course. We have events in our past that predispose us to be able to use our anger, our hatred, our need for vengeance,” hissed Lyrian. His blue eyes shined with dangerous intensity, like the sharp stare of a raptor regarding its prey. “For most of the population, extreme emotion of any type – anger or not – is fleeting and hard to harness. Emotion and true intention brings out the raw magic within us.”

“I see,” said Harry. “I suppose my brother will probably be one of those light wizards, then – the ones that use raw light magic.”

“He does seem to be on that path, especially with how he is getting special attention from teachers,” agreed Lyrian. The fifth-year Slytherin let out a short sigh, shaking his head. “Whatever. Come on, Harry, let’s duel again.”



Lyrian smiled at him and, tentatively, Harry smiled back. He soon learned that whenever he would duel with Lyrian, he would always end up nursing scratches and bruises everywhere. It was exhausting and painful, and yet at the same time he felt like he was really making something of himself.

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"Potter, I need the cloak for tonight," Sonia told him. The look in her eyes told him that it wasn't a question.

"Why?" he asked. He couldn't hide the challenging tone to his voice. Irrationally, he felt like he had done the hard work by retrieving it, so that it was his property – even though she had been instrumental in the brewing of the potion.

"Does it matter?" she snapped. "It's as much mine as yours, so hand it over."

"Fine," Harry relented, switching tactics. "D'you need any help with what you're doing, then?"

"No," said Sonia shortly. Harry shrugged and jogged up the stairs to the dormitory to fish the cloak out of his bag.

When he reached the first year boys' room, he stopped in the doorway when he heard voices. Peeking to the side, he saw Draco, Theodore, and Blaise were all sitting on Blaise's bed, talking. As soon as Harry entered the room, they stopped abruptly.

"What're you doing here, Potter?" Theodore growled accusingly.

"Perhaps you've forgotten, but this is my dormitory too," Harry replied coolly. "Sorry to interrupt your little party."

Blaise seemed similarly miffed, but Draco was regarding him appraisingly. He caught Harry's eyes and then turned to the other two boys. "I think we can trust Potter with this much, at least," he said evenly.

“But he’d probably just go tattling to his goody-goody brother,” Theodore began biting, but Draco cut him off.

“I think by now he’s proven that he has no love for his brother or the Gryffindors in general,” reasoned Draco.

“That’s just what he wants us to think!” Theodore insisted.

“Oh, shut it, Theo,” snapped Draco, rolling his eyes.

“Why the change of heart, Malfoy? At the beginning of this year, you didn’t seem so sure about me,” said Harry suspiciously, still standing a good distance away from them, his arms akimbo and his head cocked to one side.

“I’m not stupid, Potter,” sniffed Draco. “And besides, at the beginning of the year, you were a wild card, Slytherin or not. Now at least you’ve chosen your loyalties well.”

Harry nodded mutely, accepting the answer. To the boy’s credit, he had noticed that Draco hadn’t been hostile to him for quite a while. Draco moved over on the bed and ostensibly made room for Harry. Blaise started stonily at him and Theodore scowled when he took a seat.

“So what’s all the secrecy about?” asked Harry curiously as he settled himself on the bed.

“Basically, this genius,” gestured Blaise, pointing to Draco, “got extra-nosey this morning.”

“I’m not nosey,” Draco felt compelled to say. He then added, smiling, “I’m just observant.”

“Sure,” said Blaise neutrally.

“And what were you doing?” Harry prompted, regarding the blonde boy with interest.

“I saw your twin, the Weasel, and that Mudblood Granger all going down to Hagrid’s whispering about something happening in Hagrid’s hut this morning before Herbology,” Draco said, smirking. “Soon they went down to see the great oaf – I had to follow, of course, to see what they were up to, and you wouldn’t believe what I saw there.”

At this, Theodore stopped his frowning at Harry and entered the conversation enthusiastically. “A dragon!”

Draco looked put out. “Way to ruin the suspense, Theo.”

Theodore shrugged but then looked to Harry for his reaction. Harry’s brows were furrowed and skepticism was written clearly across his face. “A... dragon? There’s no way Hagrid could fit anything bigger than himself into that hut.”

“Not a fully grown dragon, you dolt,” said Theodore scathingly. “A baby dragon – a hatching one.”

“Next time elaborate, then, Nott. I’m not a mind-reader, you know,” said Harry frostily. He then thought of Legilimency, and couldn’t help the half-smile that formed on his lips. Not a mind-reader yet, anyway. If he could ever master Occlumency he intended to become a Legilimens himself.

“Yes, well, a great egg was on the table there and there was a spiny black dragon breaking through it,” Draco detailed. “Just as it finished hatching, Hagrid looked up and saw me in the window. I sprinted back to the castle just in time.”

“So you didn’t get caught?”

“Nope,” Draco said smugly. “But now I’ve got some dirt on Hagrid. I don’t know how he plans to hide a dragon, but now I’ve basically got blackmail to use against him.”

“Nice,” said Harry appreciatively.

“Now the question is,” Blaise interjected, “what are we going to do with that blackmailing power?”

“And Potter... not you, obviously... Weasley, and Granger probably know that Draco was the one to see them,” Theodore added. “So they’ll probably want to keep Hagrid safe, and we can use that to our advantage.”

“So we’ve got blackmail on them, too, if we bank on their attachment to Hagrid,” reasoned Blaise, his dark eyes thoughtful.

Just then, a knock sounded on the dormitory door, which Harry had closed behind him for more privacy. “I’m waiting, Potter!” an annoyed female voice sounded, muffled on the other side. Sonia.

Harry jumped up at once – he’d forgotten all about getting the cloak for her.

“Shit... gotta go, guys,” he told them regretfully. “Talk to you about this later?”

“Yeah, sure,” said Blaise dispassionately.

“What’s she waiting for, eh Potter?” Draco teased, wagging his eyebrows suggestively. Theodore laughed.

“Stuff it, Malfoy,” Harry shot back at him, grabbing his bag, but he was smiling. He made his way to the door just as another series of pounding knocks thudded on the door.

“If you’re not out in another five seconds, I don’t care that it’s the boys’ dormitory! I’m coming in!” Sonia yelled. Her voice died off just as Harry opened the door.

Harry stepped outside and closed the door behind him, muffling the catcalls and jeers from the other boys behind him.

Sonia stood quietly next to him, her cheeks a little pink from screaming. “What did you tell them, Potter?” she asked him accusingly, having heard snippets of the jeers from within.

“Nothing, they just like to assume,” said Harry, rolling his eyes. He looked up and down the staircase to make sure no one else was near.

“Here,” he offered her, quickly taking the cloak out of his bag and putting it in her hands. She put it on immediately and promptly disappeared from sight.

“There’s a spell for that, you know,” she said quietly to his side. Harry spun and faced the direction of her voice – she’d moved a bit, just to unsettle him.

“For what?” he whispered back.

“To find out if anyone else is in the immediate area,” she explained. “The incantation is *deprehensio animos*.”

“Brilliant, thanks,” Harry said sincerely. He loved learning new and useful spells.

“Later, Potter,” she whispered, and, only because he was listening closely, he heard the padding of quiet footfalls down the stairs.

He went down to the common room and out, heading to lunch in the Great Hall. He’d catch up with the other boys later; it was far more fun to let them think he was still with Sonia than to go right back in to talk with them.

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Severus,

As you are aware, I am still on the lookout for any sign of the Dark Lord. My searching had yielded nothing until recently – I heard whispers that his soul has found a host... that he is sharing the body of one of his followers.

I wish our Lord would contact those of us most loyal to him and trust us with his identity... but alas, it seems that he is acting alone for now – if these rumors are to indeed be believed. I have contacted a

number of those loyal to the Dark Lord to inquire if they are hosting our master, but all responses are, so far, negative.

I confess I am disappointed, but nonetheless, I implore you – keep an eye out for anyone who may be hosting our Lord or have information about his whereabouts. I have an item of his which he entrusted to me just before his downfall, and I feel it may aid his ‘resurrection’ should we find confirmation of his soul’s existence.

Now to other matters. I trust Draco has been performing well, in a manner befitting a Malfoy heir, in his potions classes and elsewhere? Any complaints – any at all – and I urge you to contact me at once. I will not have a misbehaving, underperforming son.

I eagerly await any news you may have,

Lucius Malfoy

Severus Snape reread the letter and placed it on his desk with a sigh. He, too, had heard rumors stirring in places such as Knockturn Alley of the Dark Lord – although originally, he had spoken to Dumbledore about the matter.

Dumbledore had informed him that some magical alarms he had put in place many years ago had, this past summer, detected a faint echo of Voldemort’s magical signature once again within Britain. He had urged Snape to inform him of any news he might be privy to regarding Voldemort, but little had occurred since then.

Snape rubbed his eyes wearily and sat down. He hadn’t received any indication that Voldemort was around, but he was sick and tired of dealing with Quirrell. The greedy, impetuous young man was after the Sorcerer’s Stone that he had helped to hide inside the school, and Snape for one wasn’t about to let him get to it.

Snape would have thought that the man was the host to Voldemort, but he was a coward and fairly weak-willed – something the Dark Lord would never look for in a follower with which to share a body. Snape had even used Legilimency on him and found nothing but pointless, unrelated memories. Fortunately, as far as Snape could tell,

Quirrell would never make it near the Stone. He couldn't even find his way past that bloody Cerberus of Hagrid's.

Still thinking of Legilimency, his mind wandered once again to Harry Potter. When he had used Legilimency on the boy he had encountered a strong mental shield... something he'd never seen in someone so young. Even more concerning was that he knew that the last time he'd brushed the boy's mind with Legilimency, after the flying incident with his brother at the beginning of the year, there wasn't even a sign of any shield at all. He must have somehow created the barrier in the past months, and that was no easy feat.

At least he knew that Potter was still an amateur. While those who attempted to learn Occlumency could sometimes manage a shield like his, only the masters were able to hide the shield altogether with false or unimportant memories. That was extremely rare, however. As far as he knew, only the Dark Lord, Dumbledore, and himself were able to achieve that kind of skill. It was something that Snape prided himself on very much – after all, the other two masters he knew of were the greatest wizards of the age.

Taking a deep breath, Snape grabbed some parchment and a quill and began to pen a letter back to Lucius. He was curious about the item that Lucius mentioned, the one that might aid the Dark Lord in returning. That was the sort of information he should probably report to Dumbledore, but it had been a long time since he had actually worked as a spy, and now that the former Death Eaters were not actually in service to the Dark Lord, they were much more pleasant to interact with.

For now, simply finding out what Lucius was talking about would do. He'd decide depending on the answer if it was important enough to mention to Dumbledore.

- - -

"It's perfect," said Blaise with satisfaction. "If we're lucky, your idiot brother will get killed in the process, too."

“Yeah,” agreed Harry blankly. While he wasn’t quite sure he wanted Eric dead, he agreed a decent scare would be good for him.

The Slytherin first year boys had agreed on a suitable event to use their blackmail on. They were going to threaten the Gryffindor trio to meet them in the Forbidden Forest for a duel – and then not show up. Harry had performed some rather complicated magic to create a sort of map for them, so that they’d have a destination. Every time they would tap the parchment with their wands, it would show them the direction they’d need to go in and how many yards to keep at it.

Both Draco and Blaise had been visibly impressed at Harry’s magical ability, even though they knew logically that he was the best in their year by far. Theo was less inclined to display awe for anything Harry did, but Harry had still caught him staring at the parchment appreciatively when he thought Harry wasn’t looking. Harry glowed with pride – finally, these boys were beginning to accept him and his long hours in the library and practicing magic were paying off.

“The best part is, they probably know we’re not going to show, just like when I challenged them last time,” Draco sniggered. “And they can’t do a thing about it unless they want Hagrid chunked out of the school for possession of a dragon.”

Blaise smirked. “Ah, Gryffindors. So easy to capitalize on their pointless affection for one another.”

Harry chuckled in agreement as he walked down a corridor with the three. As they entered the Great Hall, Tracey Davis was heading past them in the opposite direction. She slowed down and caught Harry’s eye, giving him a sly smile, before continuing on.

“Sweet Merlin, Potter, what is it with you and all the girls?” Draco exclaimed as soon as she was out of sight.

“Oh come off it, Draco,” he said easily, slipping and calling Draco by his first name for once. “They don’t like me like that. Besides, I’ve noticed Pansy Parkinson giving you even more suggestive looks than that.”



It was indisputably true, and Draco grinned in silent agreement. While none of the boys were particularly interested in the girls, it was always flattering to know that someone liked you.

They sat down at the Slytherin table next to Vincent and Greg, who were guffawing at some crude joke that a second year told them. They acknowledged their dorm-mates and then continued listening to the older boy. Harry grabbed some bread and began to make a turkey sandwich while they spoke.

“So, we’re going to confront them when they get up and leave, right?” Harry asked for confirmation, eyeing the Gryffindor table where his brother and the Weasleys sat together.

“Yeah, that’s the plan,” said Blaise.

Harry sat with the boys, enjoying the feeling of fitting in immensely, and it was on Blaise’s lookout when the golden trio stood up to leave.

“Now, guys,” Blaise said quickly, interrupting a story that Theo was telling about his sister. Theo looked disappointed but then he scrambled up along with the rest of them.

Just as Eric, Hermione, and Draco stepped out of the Great Hall into a corridor, the four Slytherin boys appeared behind them.

“If it isn’t Potty, the Weasel, and the Mudblood, yet again,” Draco drawled as soon as they were in earshot. Immediately the three swiveled around to face their tormentors.

Eric’s hazel eyes were fiery. “Watch your mouth, Malfoy,” he snapped. His eyes flashed to Harry, registering a dead sort of surprise at seeing him, and then he quickly locked eyes back on Malfoy, frowning tightly.

“Now, now, Potter,” sneered Draco, “I don’t believe you’re in the position to be giving out orders.”

If possible, Eric’s lips tightened even more. “What’re you getting at, Malfoy?”

"The dragon, Potter," said Blaise quietly, chuckling quietly.

"The dragon is none of your business," said Hermione shortly, at the same time that Ron Weasley blurted, "What dragon? I don't know anything about a dragon."

Harry laughed along with the rest of them.

"Might need to work on that communication a bit more, Weasel," Theo sniggered.

Ron fumed, his ears turning bright red. Hermione had an expression of mingled exasperation and anxiety. Her eyes narrowed as she caught Harry's eye. Harry shrugged noncommittally and then gave her a mockingly winning smile. She didn't seem too happy about that, and pursed her lips, looking away.

"What d'you want, then," said Eric shortly.

"Why're you just giving in like that?" cried Ron to his best friend, his cheeks blazing red.

"Come on, Ron. You're a strategist. They're threatening to tell on Hagrid unless we do what they want," explained Eric in a defeated voice that was laced with anger.

"Glad to see you've caught on," said Harry, speaking up for the first time.

"Oh shut the hell up, Harry," said Eric easily as soon as Harry opened his mouth. "What is it, then?" he asked, looking to Draco.

"A duel – tomorrow night at midnight, in the Forbidden Forest. If you don't show, you'd better say goodbye to your beloved Hagrid," Draco challenged, looking highly pleased with himself.

"That's completely unreasonable!" Hermione cried. "Not only are we not allowed to go there, but it's for good reason! We could be killed – or worse, expelled!"

Everyone standing there looked to her incredulously. "Somebody needs to get her priorities in order," said Blaise under his breath, and even Ron and Eric seemed to agree.

"Does that mean you won't show, then?" asked Theo, grinning. "Because we can surely just go inform the authorities right now."

"We didn't say that," growled Ron. "We'll be there."

Eric's jaw was set and his eyes hard. "Yeah. But if we win the duel – or you don't show up – you have to promise not to tell anyone about Hagrid."

"We make no promises," sniffed Harry. "Again, you're not in a position to define the terms."

Eric stared at him, eyes ablaze. Harry didn't flinch or look away.

"Fine," said Eric tightly. He turned back to Hermione, who had a wildly calculating expression on her face. She nodded almost imperceptibly to Eric and then faced the Slytherin bunch.

"How are we going to know where exactly to meet you, then?" she asked.

"Here," offered Harry, sliding the map he made out of his pocket and handing it to her. He quickly explained how it worked – and despite her distemper, she was obviously trying to hide her admiration for the magic he must have done.

"See you there, then," she stated once he finished explaining, then turned on her heel and walked away, dragging Ron with her. Eric lingered for another moment and then followed his friends.

The four boys grinned and made their way back to their common room. "I'd say that went rather well, then," said Blaise with satisfaction.

"I don't know. Hermione – er – Granger looked like she was up to something," said Harry, stumbling over her name. He tried to hide his

blush... he wasn't supposed to be on a first name basis with any Gryffindor bar his brother, and especially not with a Mudblood.

Draco eyed him but didn't comment. Theo, however, spoke up. "See?" he gestured to Blaise and Draco. "There's no excuse for that – calling a Mudblood by her first name, as if they're friends," Theo spat.

Harry noticed they didn't tell Theo to shut up this time, but they still didn't comment. Harry's stomach sunk uneasily and his back stiffened. "Whatever," he said unconcernedly, trying to play his mistake off as unimportant to him.

They reached the Slytherin dungeons and Harry was just about to be the last one to enter the common room, when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

Instantly on edge, he spun around only to see no one there. "Deprehensio animos!" he cried, unsure of the wand motion, but hoping that it would work anyway. To his relief, it did; an intangible awareness suddenly rushed through him that there was one person in the immediate vicinity.

"Sonia I hope to hell that's you," he muttered, looking around wildly.

"Yeah it's me, Harry," her voice sounded from his left. She removed the cloak, and Harry would have been relieved were it not for the look on her face.

"Come quickly, you've got to help me," she said desperately. Her jaw was strained and her expression urgent.

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"I saw..." her voice teetered on hysteria. "I think I saw the Dark Lord."

:)

Please review and tell me your thoughts!

## Chapter 12: The Stone

“Wait... what?” said Harry blankly, stunned. “The Dark Lord? Are you feeling all right, Sonia?”

“I’m fine,” she snapped, but her yellow-green eyes were suspiciously watery. She breathed in shakily and turned away from him, blinking rapidly. “I don’t know what to do,” she said hopelessly, putting her hands to her head in anguish.

“Well, you can start by showing me what you saw,” offered Harry. He was still regarding her at a bit of a distance – both because he was no good with distraught girls and also because he wasn’t quite sure what was going on with her.

She swallowed and nodded. “Yeah, okay. Come on, quick.”

She held up the invisibility cloak so that he could fit under it as well, and the two of them set off up a flight of stairs. Harry felt distinctly awkward being so close to her while she was upset, but pushed his discomfort down and listened to what she was saying.

“I took the cloak from you because I needed some time to be alone... completely alone,” she whispered as they traveled. “I got a letter from my parents yesterday morning.”

She paused as they took care to jump over a trick step, but Harry noticed she took an extra long time to speak again, as if she were composing herself. Indeed, when she spoke next, her voice was strong but carefully dull.

“My family now has me betrothed to some pureblood going to Durmstrang,” she said flatly. “He’s apparently a much better deal than we ever could have hoped for, what with our family’s recent reputation... for squibs, you know,” she added bitterly.

Harry had no idea what to say to this, so he remained silent.

Sonia let out a short, humorless laugh. “Yes, he’s seventeen right now and was shown pictures of me...he was very impressed by me, apparently... and his family agreed. So it’s all decided now,” she said in a dead voice. “We’re to be married once I graduate school. What a sick bastard – to look at a twelve-year-old, and to think I’m someone he wants... like – like that... and me – just an item! A fucking thing to trade away!”

Her voice had risen with anger. Harry still had no clue of how to deal with this, so he motioned for her to keep the volume level down. They were still under the cloak, after all; it wouldn’t do for someone to come around the corner and hear their voices with no bodies.

“Sorry,” she relented, winding down a bit. She led him out onto the grounds and they walked towards Hagrid’s hut. Harry wondered where in hell they could be going.

“Anyway, I needed some time to be alone. And it was incredibly stupid of me, but I love being outside – it just calms me. So I was out here, under the cloak near the edge of the forest,” she motioned as she led him along.

“I saw something moving just into the forest, not far past the edge of the trees, and I thought it was strange that a creature would be so close to the school,” she began, stopping near the tree line. Harry noticed a spattering of silvery goop on the ground – unicorn blood. His neck prickled uncomfortably with dread.

“So I looked closer and I saw—”

“That’s quite enough, Miss Moon,” a deep voice sounded from behind them.

They both spun around in shock, knowing they were under the cloak far from the school – who knew it was them and had followed them out here?

It was Professor Quirrell; Sonia gasped but Harry let out a little sigh of relief. At least Quirrell was the one professor who wouldn’t get him in

trouble for having the cloak. As Quirrell's brown eyes continued to stare into him, though, even though he was invisible, he began to feel a bit disconcerted.

"You can see through invisibility cloaks, sir?" asked Harry.

"H-h-harry," Sonia breathed, "it's—"

"Silencio!" cried Quirrell at once, cutting her off.

"Sir?" said Harry, looking from him to Sonia, who was still gesturing wildly to him. He couldn't understand what she wanted him to know, though – she was being too frantic.

"Potter, Moon," he said, eyeing the two of them. "Come with me."

Harry glanced to Sonia again. She looked positively sick with fear. "Where are you taking us, sir?" he asked suspiciously.

"Be quiet and do as you're told, Potter... unless you'd like to be forced?" suggested Quirrell menacingly.

Harry knew what he was implying – the Imperius curse... or perhaps something worse. The most terrible part about it was that he knew Quirrell was quite capable of anything he might threaten with dark magic.

"No, sir," he responded quietly, although inwardly his mind was working furiously.

Quirrell took him and Sonia up to his office. The whole way there, Sonia was motioning to him incomprehensibly. Harry wished fervently that he knew Legilimency so that he could see her surface thoughts, but he only had ever practiced Occlumency. Just as they were going through the threshold to Quirrell's office, Harry noticed a speck of silver sparkle on the bottom of his robes. Unicorn blood – on Professor Quirrell's robes!

“Sit,” ordered Quirrell, gesturing to the two armchairs. Sonia and Harry sat.

“I am aware of what you witnessed today, Miss Moon,” Quirrell said quietly, his voice deep and severe. Harry’s eyes shifted between the two: Sonia, who appeared panicked, and Quirrell, whose visage was more serious than he’d ever seen it. “So regrettable that you both had to be young Slytherins with so much potential... I would have preferred it if some impetuous Gryffindors had found me out...”

Harry wondered if Sonia had seen Quirrell practicing dark magic, and had in her distraught state confused him with the Dark Lord. “Er... why, sir? We’ll keep your secret safe better than any Gryffindor would be able to – that you’re a dark wizard and all.”

Quirrell laughed mirthlessly. “So naïve, Potter. I’m not just a dark wizard, as Miss Moon was unfortunate enough to discover. I...” here he paused dramatically, suddenly smiling, “I am privileged and honored to be the host to Lord Voldemort.”

The words fell flatly on Harry’s ears, so unexpected that they almost became devoid of meaning. What the hell? Sonia had silent tears trailing down her cheeks and she looked like she was having a hard time breathing. Harry glanced at her in concern but then looked back to Professor Quirrell.

“So as I was saying, it is regrettable that I will have to kill you both... especially you, Potter,” he noted as an afterthought. Harry didn’t understand how he could continue so calmly after revealing that his body was hosting the Dark Lord. “You truly could have become something great.”

Harry was barely able to force out some words, his throat felt so tight. “N-no need to kill us, Professor,” he managed.

Quirrell appeared pensive for a moment. “You’re right, Potter – I really only need to dispose of Miss Moon, here. Before long your Occlumency will be strong enough to protect your mind against all attackers. She,” he continued, gesturing to Sonia, “does not have that



luxury and so even if I obliviated her, she'd be susceptible to someone discovering the memory charm."

Harry felt rage suddenly bubble up from deep within him. "You can't kill her, either!" he shouted.

Quirrell's eyes turned cold. "I suggest you keep quiet, Mr. Potter. You have been extremely fortunate thus far to have been learning both dark magic and Occlumency from the knowledge of Lord Voldemort himself – I would not recommend angering me."

Sonia glanced at him curiously through her tears, surprised.

Just then, a deep, frigid voice sounded from behind Quirrell. "Use them," it said. "Use them to get me the stone..."

"Y-yes, my lord," said Quirrell, suddenly sounding like his usual stuttering self for once. Sonia started shaking. Her eyes met Harry's for a fleeting moment, and Harry suddenly knew that that voice was Lord Voldemort's.

"Where is he?" asked Harry tightly, referring to the disembodied voice.

"Right here," replied Quirrell quietly, gesturing to his turban. He slowly unwrapped it, and Harry felt an impending sense of dread fill his whole body. Once the turban was off, Quirrell turned around so that the two Slytherins could see the back of his head.

Harry would have screamed, but his throat felt constricted and thick. Where there should have been a back to Quirrell's head, there was a face, and it was the most terrible, revolting face that Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white, with glaring red eyes. It simply would have seemed albino, but it was distorted to a point of inhumanity and had small, thin slits for nostrils... like a snake.

"See what I have become?" the face said. "Mere shadow and vapor... I have form only when I can share another's body... but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and

minds.... Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past few weeks... the girl over there saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me at the edge of the forest... and once I have the Sorcerer's Stone, I will be able to create the Elixir of Life to make a body of my own."

Harry gaped. Quirrell had been hosting Lord Voldemort on the back of his head this whole year? The idea would have been laughable if Harry wasn't worrying about Sonia being killed. Still silenced, she was pressed up against her armchair in pure fright, features frozen in a look of shock and dread.

"Quirrell..." said Voldemort, "Use them to get you to the stone... then you may kill them as you wish..."

"Of course, my lord," said Quirrell quickly. He grabbed the turban and immediately began to tie it back up again. Just before Voldemort's face was covered by it, he locked eyes with Harry, gleaming scarlet against bright emerald.

Quirrell made short work of securing his turban and then turned around once more to face the two Slytherins. He strode to the door of his office. "What are you two waiting for? You heard the Dark Lord. Come with me." He paused for a moment. "Actually, put that invisibility cloak back on, first. Then get going."

He quickly shot a silencing charm at Harry, who, caught by surprise, let it hit him. Now both he and Sonia were unable to speak.

Heart beating wildly, Harry reached his hand out to Sonia to help her up off the chair, and after throwing the invisibility cloak around their shoulders, the two of them trailed Professor Quirrell out of the office, clearly heading to the forbidden corridor on the third floor. As they followed their defense professor, Harry couldn't help but stare at the turban at the back of his head, now knowing what abomination was hidden beneath it.

Sonia was sobbing mutely beside him under the cloak. Awkwardly, he grabbed her hand and squeezed it in reassurance. 'I won't let you die,' he mouthed to her, hoping she could read lips better than he

could. She nodded and her lips curled into a small, grateful smile. Steeling her resolve, she seemed to straighten and pull herself together.

They finally arrived at the door to the room containing the three-headed dog. “Alohamora,” said Quirrell with conviction, breaking the lock. Before he opened the door, though, he slid ring off his finger and began transfiguring it. Harry and Sonia both watched in fascination, despite the dire situation, as the ring grew bigger and then began to change form. Quirrell was performing some complex transfiguration, far beyond the simple transformations they’d done this year in class.

Finally, the ring molded into a small harp, complete with strings and an authentic gold finish and carvings on the frame. Harry wondered absently if Quirrell had always been this magically strong, or if hosting the Dark Lord had added to his power.

Satisfied with the harp, Quirrell opened the door, ushering them inside. Harry was expecting the dog, having seen it once before, but Sonia was startled and flinched fantastically at the sight of the beast. The monstrous dog filled the whole space between ceiling and floor, its three heads and three drooling mouths snapping viciously at the lot of them.

Quirrell, supremely unconcerned, simply got the harp out and began plucking at the strings. As melodious notes filled the air, even though it wasn’t really a song, the beast’s six eyes began to droop. Harry’s eyes widened. Interesting that music would put it to sleep...

Once the dog was snoring and slumping on the ground, Quirrell gestured to Sonia. “You – open the trapdoor.”

Harry suddenly noticed the trapdoor that was half-underneath the sleeping beast. Sonia’s eyes flicked to it for a moment, and then stared pertly back at Quirrell. Harry would have chuckled if he hadn’t been silenced – he could tell that for the most part, she just didn’t want to get close to the sleeping, smelly dog.

“You’ll do as you’re told, girl,” Quirrell threatened darkly.

Sonia glared at him, took a deep breath, and started making her way slowly toward the three-headed dog. Her face was contorted as she scrunched it up, smelling the disgusting breath of the three heads as they puffed putrid air in her face. Carefully, she pushed a gigantic paw off of the trapdoor and in one sweeping motion, she grabbed the handle and pulled it open.

Harry approached, standing next to her. They both looked down into the hole revealed by the trapdoor and stared into the blackness. Still plucking at the harp, Quirrell strode forward to stand next to them and peered into it himself.

“Right then,” he said, “Jump on in.”

He again was staring at Sonia, and his insistence on risking her life was making Harry furious. He got Quirrell’s attention and gestured to his lips angrily.

“Oh fine,” relented Quirrell reluctantly. “Finite incantatem,” he said, pointing his wand at Harry and Sonia in turn.

“There’s no way I’m jumping in there,” said Sonia haughtily, squinting down the hole.

“I’m afraid you haven’t a choice,” remarked Quirrell easily.

“I’ll go instead,” offered Harry, not caring that he was acting like a Gryffindor.

“No,” said Quirrell sharply. “I want the girl to go. She is more disposable than you.”

“She is not!” insisted Harry, glancing at Sonia, who looked hurt despite herself.

“Get down there, girl, before I make you!” growled Quirrell.

When Sonia didn't budge, he drew his wand and pointed it at her. "Imperio!" he bellowed, dropping the harp.

Immediately Sonia's eyes lost some of their usual intensity and the muscles in her face became lank and dead. Harry pointed his wand at Quirrell to try to stop him, but just as he opened his mouth, Quirrell made Sonia jump down the hole. A moment too late, Harry's disarming curse hit Quirrell and the professor's wand came flying through the air at Harry, who caught it expertly.

Behind him, the dog was making restless noises, slowly waking up. Frantically, Harry started humming loudly, even though it was the last thing he felt like doing. The dog seemed to settle down.

"Idiot boy," hissed Quirrell, who rushed at Harry to get his wand back. Harry, who was more worried about Sonia than Quirrell getting his wand back, yelled down the hole between hums, "Sonia!"

"I'm okay!" she answered back, though her voice was faint as if she was very far away.

Meanwhile, Quirrell tackled Harry to the ground and roughly hit him in the face as he ripped his wand from Harry's grasp. "Ow!" said Harry. "Get off me!"

"Harry...?" said Sonia, now sounding anxious. "I'm not so sure anymore about this plant that I'm on..."

His cheek still smarting from where Quirrell had hit him, Harry scrambled up off the floor and immediately jumped down the trapdoor. With the lack of music, the dog was almost fully awake again and had begun growling. He'd much rather help Sonia than stay with the beast....

With a surprisingly soft thud, Harry landed on what felt like a slimy cushion and felt around, eyes not used to the gloom. "Lumos," he said, blinking.

With horror, he saw Sonia bound in long creepers, struggling to get free. Unfortunately, the more she moved, the tighter the plant twisted around her, sending out vines perilously close to her neck. A page in a book suddenly appeared in Harry's mind – Devil's Snare, the plant he'd been researching before he'd talked to Hermione in the library for the first time.

"Stop moving!" he shouted, even as tendrils of plant started to curl around his own ankles. Brandishing his wand, he sent bluebell flames at the plant beneath Sonia's feet. It shivered and slowly loosened its hold on her, shying away from the heat.

Sonia breathed a sigh of relief and her eyes met his gratefully. "Thank you," she said quietly.

Barely a moment later, they both turned to look at Quirrell, who landed beside them. "Good to see you took care of the problem," he said flippantly, although he was grinning. His casual demeanor only pissed Harry off more.

Harry sneered at him. "With a lot of help from you, thanks for that," he said sarcastically.

"What can I say? My Lord was right, as he always is. Using you two to test out the way is much easier."

Sonia huffed in frustration, and nose high in the air, began to head down a stone passageway which was their only way out. Harry glanced sourly at Quirrell and then followed her. If they couldn't get out of the situation now, they might as well help Quirrell... before he decided that bringing them along wasn't worth it. They reached a room which was abuzz with glittering things flying through the air. At first Harry thought they were jeweled birds, but then he realized that no, they were actually keys with wings.

Sonia groaned. "No way," she sighed, putting her hands to her face. "There are hundreds of them! How in the world are we going to pick the right one to get through the door?"

Quirrell appeared next to them, and the three of them peered up into the high ceiling of the room where keys flitted this way and that, in different colors and sizes.

“They’d have to be charmed to do that, right?” muttered Harry, deep in thought.

Sonia laughed derisively. “No, Potter, keys normally fly. Of course they’re charmed, you dolt!”

Harry glared at her. “That’s not what I was getting at. All I’m saying is that anything that’s been magicked has an aura, right?”

Quirrell turned to him, surprised. “Where have you been learning that, Potter?”

“Places,” said Harry evasively. “I’m right, though, am I not?”

“Yes, you’re correct,” said Quirrell, still looking at him suspiciously.

“So I’ll bet anything that that key will probably have a special aura – after all, it’s the only one in here that actually goes into opening a lock, so I reckon it’ll feel different than the others,” reasoned Harry thoughtfully as he watched the flapping keys.

“I also think that it’ll match the lock,” Sonia pointed out, her eyes fixed on the door. “Silver, big, and kind of antique looking.”

Harry closed his eyes and thought back to his lessons with Lyrian where he’d become expert at following auras. Still in that mindset, he opened his eyes and let his instinct guide him more than anything. The auras swirled around him in a great mass, all identical except some which were a little bigger than others, depending on the size of their corresponding key.

A headache started to set in due to the sheer number of them, but Harry continued feeling out the auras of the hundreds of keys. He was just about to give up, when suddenly one stuck out to him. Automatically, he pointed his wand at it as if it were one of the targets

he'd practiced on. "Cerulem via!" he shouted, using the more powerful form of the color spell he'd used when tutoring Tracey.

The jet of dark blue light crackled out of his wand and hit the key, causing it to shine brightly with color. Sonia gaped at him, her yellow-green eyes wide. Even Quirrell was staring at him oddly. "Even more a reason to keep you alive," Harry heard him mutter under his breath.

"If you want me alive, you don't kill Sonia," he quipped back, although he still had a bit of a headache. He also hadn't forgotten the pounding pain in his cheek; he was certain if there wasn't one already there, that he'd have a large purple bruise on the spot before long.

There were broomsticks available in the room, but to be honest, Harry wasn't much up to flying to get it. "Will you just use the pulling spell to get it down?" he wearily asked Quirrell, who nodded in response.

"Traxi blue key," said Quirrell, but the key remained twittering around the room innocently. "It's resistant," he explained, frowning.

Sonia frowned at Harry. "I think you'll have to get it. I'm shit on a broom," she lamented.

Harry sighed and reluctantly climbed onto the broom nearest to him. "Here goes nothing," he murmured, and then shot up into the air. As if on cue, the keys started flying more furiously and more erratically, turning and twisting at odd times. Harry focused on the sparkling blue key and nothing else; he flew faster than he could ever remember, doing loops and corkscrews as the key tried to outwit him.

Finally, like the seeker he was, his grasp closed on the key, squishing its wings. Harry could have sworn the key gave a little squeak at the indignity of being crushed. "Got it," he pointed out unnecessarily as he lowered to the ground.

"Nice flying," said Sonia, smirking.

"Yeah, whatever," said Harry, tired. "Here."



Sonia took the key and immediately jammed it into the lock, turning it so that the door opened. They all stepped into the next chamber, which was at first quite dark but then filled with blinding light as soon as they entered.

They were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard, behind black chessmen which looked like huge carved statues made of ebony. "This must have been McGonagall's test," said Quirrell. "Only she'd do something like this."

"What do we have to do?" asked Harry, staring at the eerie faceless white chessmen on the other side.

"Play our way across, obviously," said Sonia a bit snappily.

"Well I'm no good at chess," said Harry. "You've always beaten me, the few times we've played."

Sonia sniffed. "Barely. I'm hardly better than you are."

They both turned to Quirrell. "Well?" said Sonia impatiently, waiting for him to weigh in on the situation.

Quirrell grimaced sheepishly. "I'm rubbish at chess as well."

"Great," muttered Harry.

"Don't worry, though," added Quirrell with a dark chuckle. "I happen to have a master strategist on the back of my head."

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"Where the hell is Potter?" snapped Draco. Night had fallen rapidly, and the four Slytherin boys had agreed to meet that evening. They'd planned on waiting for the three Gryffindors by the Forbidden Forest when they came out – that was, if they came out. They needed to make sure the Gryffindors hadn't chickened out and shirked their side of the deal.

“Probably in the forest with the Weasel and Mudblood,” said Theo, sneering.

“Not that Potter, you stinking idiot. Harry,” clarified Draco in exasperation.

“Well, Merlin’s balls, Malfoy,” said Theo irritably. “There do happen to be two of them with the same surname; don’t be such a prick about it.”

Blaise sighed, used to their bickering. “I haven’t seen him in a while, actually.”

Theo paused, and then his eyes lighted up. “I told you guys! I bet he went and told his Gryffindork brother not to show.”

“Maybe, but then we’d still be able to tell on Hagrid,” reasoned Blaise. His eyebrows furrowed suddenly. “Unless they dragged him out there with them or something...”

“Why would they do that? Golden Boy hates his twin,” reminded Draco.

“I dunno,” said Blaise slowly. “But you have to admit, he’s quite a bit more powerful than the average wizard. Could be good protection for them.”

“Yeah,” agreed Theo. “You should have seen him that one day I walked in on him doing accidental magic.”

“Maybe he’s stronger than the two of you, but speak for yourselves,” sniffed Draco, miffed.

A moment passed, and Theo checked his wristwatch. “It’s way past the time we agreed to meet.”

“This isn’t like him,” said Blaise thoughtfully. “You don’t think anything happened to him, do you?”

“Aww Blaisey, are you worried?” cooed Draco.

“Shut the fuck up, Malfoy,” snapped Blaise. “Just because you’re a heartless, frigid bastard doesn’t mean the rest of us are. Besides, this is hardly an emotional concern. He wouldn’t want to miss this and lose face in front of us Slytherins, so I highly doubt he’d not show unless something was going on.”

“Fine,” said Draco stiffly after a moment. “Would you like to be the one to go to Dumbledore, then? Because I’m sure not too keen on revealing just why we’re out here.”

“Not particularly, no,” said Blaise dryly.

“Let’s check around the most likely places and then if we can’t find him, go to Snape first,” suggested Theo. “Yeah, he’s a hard-ass, but he’d go easier on us than any of the other professors would.”

Draco and Blaise looked at him. “Yeah, okay,” agreed Blaise. “I’ll look in the library – Draco, you search the common room and our dorm, and Theo, check the kitchens and the owlry.”

Draco nodded. “Let’s go.”

The three boys clambered off in their separate ways to check their respective areas. Each boy, however, had no luck, and twenty minutes later they reconvened, all looking dejected.

“Down to the dungeons to find Snape then?” asked Blaise quietly taking in the sight of the others without Harry.

“Yeah,” said Theo, and so they all scrambled down to the dungeons, heading for their Head of House. Before long they were standing outside of the door to Snape’s office, but no one made any sudden motions to knock on the door.

“You do it,” hissed Draco at Theo, gesturing to the door.

“Why not you?” retorted Theo, his dark eyes challenging.

“We already decided to do this, you know,” pointed out Blaise. He rolled his eyes. “You guys are such cowards.”

With that, Blaise stepped forward and rapped sharply on the door twice. He stepped back and waited expectantly with Draco and Theo. Trepidation ran through the lot of them as they heard steps approaching.

Frowning, Severus Snape opened the door to the sight of three first year Slytherins, standing before him. This was another reason he hated being a Head of House... “Yes?” he asked slowly, as if speaking to someone mentally deficient.

“We’re concerned that Harry Potter’s missing,” explained Blaise, when it became evident that neither of the others was about to speak.

Snape blinked. That wasn’t what he was had been expecting to hear. “Why?”

“He was supposed to meet us,” said Theo, “hours ago. There’s no way he’d not show, and no one’s seen him all afternoon. We looked all around the castle.”

Snape surveyed them shrewdly. “Meet you for what?”

The three of them shuffled uncomfortably. Finally, Draco spoke up. “We... we sort of challenged some of the Gryffindors in our year... to go out into the forest... we were going to make sure they did it.”

“You childish imbeciles,” spat Snape. “Which Gryffindors?” he asked heavily, with the distinct impression he already knew the answer, even without Legilimency.

“Eric Potter, Ron Weasley, and the Mud- er, Hermione Granger,” replied Blaise, wincing.

“Great – you’re risking Dumbledore’s ‘Golden Boy’s life,” growled Snape, beginning to pace back and forth. “And did you see them go in or out of the forest tonight?”

“Well... no,” said Draco, “but Professor, about Harry-”

“I think Harry Potter is our lesser concern at the moment, Mr. Malfoy,” said Snape stiffly. “I will go to Dumbledore and have him take care of the matter of Eric Potter... then I shall go searching for his twin myself, if that will appease you...”

They nodded silently, suddenly feeling like this was more trouble than it was worth.

Snape began to make his way up to Dumbledore’s office, brushing past the boys, when he heard a call behind him.

“Wait,” said Theo in a small voice, “Are you going to tell Dumbledore that we put them up to this?”

Snape just stared at him stonily, but when he opened his mouth his words were actually rather soft. “There is no need to inform him. There is enough hatred for Slytherin in this school, and it would be best if that is not antagonized further.”

Theo smiled, but Snape simply rolled his eyes and swept past them, cloak billowing with the force of his stride.

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Stupid young Slytherins, Severus thought for the fourth time, shaking his head in frustration. Merlin knows Eric Potter needs a good scare, but Dumbledore will have my head if he dies by my students...

He finally approached the Headmaster’s office, spoke the password (Acid Pops) and climbed past the stone gargoyle guarding the entrance. As he headed up the spiral stairs to where Dumbledore would be, another thought popped into his head.

And yet Harry Potter actually seems to have made some friends... he mused. They were worried about him, even if they didn't want to admit it. Interesting.

Sighing, Severus knocked on Dumbledore's door.

"Come in," called the distinct voice from within. He opened the door to reveal Dumbledore sitting quietly at his desk, sipping some tea.

"Tea, Severus?" offered Dumbledore amiably, not seeming to notice or care that the potions master was obviously not in the mood for pleasantries. Severus pointedly ignored the offer.

"Sir, Eric Potter and his two friends have been challenged to go into the Forbidden Forest tonight," he began. "They've not been seen going in or out, but I suspect that the Gryffindors would not back down from something like that, rash as they are."

"Oh dear," said Dumbledore lightly, but his eyes sharpened. He stood up. "I'll alert the faculty to be on the lookout throughout the school, and send Hagrid into the forest at once."

Dumbledore paused before moving and locked eyes with Snape. "Thank you for informing me, Severus."

Severus nodded curtly and exited the office. At least that duty was done. Now to search for Harry Potter...

Leisurely, Severus strode through the stone corridors of Hogwarts, idly thinking of Harry Potter. He still hadn't found any evidence that the boy had stolen the cloak, and he remained frustratingly baffled that the kid had managed to somehow learn a significant amount of Occlumency throughout the short months of the school year. Severus descended a flight of stairs to the third floor, and his thoughts turned to that damn Cerberus of Hagrid's that had taken a significant chunk out of his leg not long ago. He knew Quirrell wanted to get the Stone, but so far he didn't think that the man had gotten past that vicious dog.

The beast on his mind, Severus veered off into the Forbidden corridor, and his heart nearly stopped at what he saw before him. At the end of the hall, the door to “Fluffy’s” chamber was ever so slightly ajar.

“Oh, shit,” said Severus, before breaking out in a run.

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“She can’t go there!” cried Harry.

“Quiet, Mr. Potter. Do not argue with the Dark Lord’s decision, I warn you,” hissed Quirrell. “Miss Moon, move to E8.”

They’d been playing the game for nearly an hour and the board was almost clear of pieces. It had been especially disconcerting when Voldemort’s voice sounded at times, suggesting one move or another.

“That bishop will knock me out!” protested Sonia furiously, eyes ablaze and dark brows arched. “I’m not your sacrifice!”

“Aren’t you?” said Quirrell quietly. “This is exactly why the Dark Lord suggested I bring extras along...”

“Extras,” growled Harry, echoing the man.

“I’ll ask once more, Miss Moon,” said Quirrell. “Move – before I make you do it.”

Sonia glanced fearfully back at him, clearly remembering being controlled to jump down the trapdoor. She looked at Harry briefly, and he could see the fear clearly in her eyes. He stared back at her, feeling sick. She took a shaky breath but then straightened, pushed her long black hair back, and walked slowly to E8. Before Harry’s eyes, the faceless white bishop sprang on her, punched her roughly aside and threw her across the board, where she slid pathetically off the edge.

“Sonia!” he yelled desperately. He saw her twitch, and then lay still.

“You bastard,” said Harry to Quirrell, seething. He felt the air around him start to crackle as his magic responded to his anger.

“The boy is strong...” said Voldemort suddenly, his deep raspy voice sounding oddly pleased.

“Shut up!” snapped Harry. “Capimorsus!” he shouted at Quirrell, needing to channel all of his hate into dark magic. As soon as he cast the spell, he felt the familiar rising wave of pleasure at using raw magic, and he shuttered at the sensation.

Quirrell ducked the dark spell and regarded Harry speculatively. “Good, Potter,” he said, smiling. “You have such natural talent with dark magic for one so young; it’s astounding.”

“Fuck you,” replied Harry, itching to leave his square on the chess board and attack Quirrell physically. Quirrell raised an eyebrow but otherwise didn’t respond.

“Go on then, Potter. Checkmate them,” said Quirrell placidly, gesturing to the white king.

Harry bit his lower lip, knowing there was no fighting it, and approached the king. As soon as he reached the square, the white king reached up and dropped his crown on the ground, where it landed with a heavy thunk on the marble board.

The chessmen then parted and bowed, leaving the door ahead clear. Harry, unconcerned with the next room, rushed to Sonia, who was lying limp on the ground.

“Sonia!” he cried again, throwing himself next to her. One of her arms looked bent at an unnatural angle, and a deep bruise had spread all over her shoulder and right side. Unconscious, her breaths came shallowly, as if breathing in deeply would cause her pain. Harry desperately hoped that no damage had been done to her internally.

“Come on, boy,” said Quirrell restlessly by the door. He pointed his wand at Harry in exasperation, and Harry felt a sharp tug on his body,



pulling him away from Sonia. Reluctantly, he turned away from her and hurried after Quirrell into the next room.

A disgusting smell filled their nostrils as soon as they passed through the threshold. Scanning the room, Harry first noticed two large, moldy-looking feet. In dread, he followed the feet up to what they supported – a fully grown mountain troll, stomping around, muttering to itself.

Harry suddenly remembered hearing that Eric and his friends had defeated a troll on Halloween. How had they done it? He was still curious...

“Well, I’ll make short work of this, Potter,” said Quirrell casually. Harry raised an eyebrow. “I have a special talent with trolls,” Quirrell explained.

Indeed, Harry would later admit that he had never seen anything like it. It was as if Quirrell knew exactly what the troll was thinking and where it was going to move next, even if its motions seemed erratic and random to Harry.

Quirrell distracted it by transfiguring a small dog to run around the area, while he shot spells at the troll’s various weak points – his armpits, the back of his knees, his neck, and his eyes. Just minutes had passed before Quirrell successfully hit the troll with a Conjunctivitis curse in the eyes, causing the thing to stomp around in pain and blindness. No longer able to see its attacker, the troll turned his back to Quirrell, allowing the professor to send a vicious slicing charm at the back of its neck.

As the troll stumbled forward, Quirrell bellowed a series of blasting spells at its thick skull, and only after around seven spells had hit him did the troll suddenly cry out in pain as his skull cracked. The troll slumped down, lost consciousness, and began drooling pathetically on the floor.

Calmly, Quirrell sauntered up to the troll and sent more blasting spells at it until its head looked mangled and deformed. Finally, he cast a killing curse at the bloody mass that was once the troll’s brain. Harry

watched by the entrance, half in fascination, half in revulsion. The stench was even worse now.

“Come along, Potter,” said Quirrell primly, brushing his robes off and heading for the door ahead. Harry grinned despite himself – Quirrell’s tone was as calm as if he’d invited Harry for afternoon tea.

Harry gave one last glance at the dead troll as he scurried after Quirrell. Well, at least now he knew how to take one of those down, should he ever need to...

In the next room there was nothing nearly as frightening as a mountain troll – just a table with seven differently shaped bottles standing on it in a line. As soon as Harry and Quirrell stepped through the doorway, though, a strange purple fire sprang up behind them, blocking their way back.

“Hmm,” murmured Quirrell, eyes on a roll of paper lying next to the bottles.

He picked it up and unfurling it. Harry came to stand beside him and read the message, which he soon realized was a riddle. Harry couldn’t help but snicker. Snape’s test was a logic puzzle?

“Sweet Salazar, he would do this...” muttered Quirrell, obviously frustrated.

“I can figure it out,” offered Harry.

“Yes, boy, give it a try. If you can’t get it, I’ll consult my lord.”

Harry read over the scroll a couple more times, thinking hard. It really wasn’t too difficult, he realized after a moment. One potion allowed you through the black flames to the next room; another let you go back from the purple ones. The rest were poisons of various kinds.

“Well?” said Quirrell impatiently after a moment.

“I’m thinking,” snapped Harry, although it was a complete lie. He’d figured it out, but now he had a choice...

He had the power now to give Quirrell one of the poisons. He could be done with the man right here and now – he wouldn’t get to the Sorcerer’s Stone, and he would no longer be a danger to him and Sonia. Harry knew he wouldn’t stand a chance against the Dark Lord should he be resurrected completely. What if he could get rid of it all... end it all... right now?

“This one will get you through,” he stated, holding up one of the phials. The green liquid in it sloshed innocently as he held it up.

Quirrell nodded and took it. “You’re sure?”

“Positive.”

As Quirrell brought the potion to his lips, Voldemort’s deep voice sounded, muffled slightly by Quirrell’s turban as usual. “He lies...”

Quirrell jerked the potion away from his mouth as if burnt. “You would dare try to poison me, boy? I, who saved your life? I, who taught you Occlumency and dark magic from the Dark Lord?” he hissed.

“You, who hurt Sonia? You, who drank unicorns’ blood? You, who have been deceiving everyone all along?” spat back Harry, his green eyes glimmering. His anger pushed away all of his fear. “Yeah, I do think I dare.”

“Impetuous boy!” screamed Quirrell. “Destero!” he shouted, sending a blue-purple jet of light at Harry. Harry ducked and took out his own wand.

“Geractus!” he yelled back; it was another dark curse he’d learned, but this was one Quirrell had taught him. The tingling pleasure of dark magic drove him to cast another in quick succession. “Romperio!” Harry gasped.

Quirrell brought up a shield, off which the two curses bounced harmlessly. The first spell shot across the room, dying when it hit the wall, but the second one was deflected right into the potions – shattering half of them when it impacted.

Quirrell watched the potions shatter and then let out an inhuman yell, animalistic and base. He rushed at Harry, shooting hex after hex. Harry was able to avoid most of them (he was rather small and quick, after all) but a couple of them managed to hit Harry in the legs. “Aggh,” cried Harry as a dark curse impacted with his left arm – his wand arm.

Harry screwed his face up in pain as he watched his forearm literally bubbling. His skin rippled and was the consistency of magma; Harry felt himself scream as the sensation made its way through muscle and reached his bone, melting it.

Almost delirious with pain, he switched his wand to his right hand. “Flectus morsibus!” he breathed, but the spell required a complex pattern for wand movement, and, unused to using his right hand, the spell exploded outward from his wand in a nova – definitely not what it was supposed to do.

Quirrell tried to put up a shield to stop the wave, but the one he conjured didn’t stop the botched spell, and instead it ripped through his shield and blasted him to the far wall. “My Lord!” he gasped as the side of his head collided painfully with the stone.

“Let me deal with him,” said Voldemort menacingly. Quirrell whimpered and quickly tore off his turban.

Harry was still gasping at his forearm, which had since stopped bubbling but was now a cooling, mutated mess. He looked up to the sight of the scarlet eyes and white skin of Lord Voldemort on the back of Quirrell’s head.

“I haven’t seen a young dark wizard with so much potential in many, many years,” said Voldemort, using Quirrell’s body to circle Harry in long strides. “But you, Harry Potter, will not stop me from returning.”

No, that's my brother's job, thought Harry as he watched Voldemort warily.

Faster than Harry could react, Voldemort shot a wordless slicing charm at his face. Harry felt a gash explode on the side of his cheek, and warm red blood began flowing out of the wound. Harry instinctively put a hand to the slice and when he pulled his fingers away, they were sticky with blood.

"How does it feel to be weak, Harry Potter? How does it feel to be the lesser one, the one with no power?" said Voldemort as his grotesque, lipless mouth curved into a pale grin.

Harry didn't respond. His mind was working furiously. How the hell was he going to survive this? He glared back at Voldemort as his body ached in pain.

"I thought as much. There is no good and evil, Harry Potter. There is only power and those too weak to seek it," said Voldemort reverently.

"My lord..." Harry heard Quirrell say feebly from behind Voldemort. "My lord my strength is waning... you're... my body is not strong enough for this for much longer..."

Harry suddenly realized that every time Voldemort used Quirrell's body to speak or act, the man was drained, probably magically as well as physically. He shuttered at the idea of inhabiting a body of another magical being, sharing its power source.

"Hush, Quirrell," snapped Voldemort, scarlet eyes flashing. "Boy – is the correct potion still intact?"

Harry looked over to the table, where about half the potions had been smashed by the errant spell, but a few had remained upright. He noted with a mix of dread and happiness that the correct one was still there. "Yes," he said lowly.

"Drink a mouthful of the potion and continue on."

Knowing he could hardly argue with this, Harry chose the correct phial and took a sip. The liquid slid down his throat slowly, and a feeling of ice spread through his body. With a glance at Quirrell/Voldemort, he stepped through the black flames as they harmlessly licked his body. Just as he opened the door to continue, he saw Voldemort behind him pick up the same flask and drink out of it.

The last chamber was completely empty, except for one thing – the long floor-length mirror that Harry had found one night, which had showed him a vision of himself in the future, loved by his parents. Harry purposefully didn't stand in front of the mirror; he did not want to see that cruel picture again.

Seconds later, Quirrell/Voldemort joined him in the room. Immediately, he stood before the mirror, gazing at it longingly. "What is this trick of Dumbledore's? I can see the stone! It's right there..."

"Potter!" he barked suddenly. "What do you see?"

Reluctantly, Harry stepped in front of the mirror. This time, the Harry that peered back at him wasn't older, but instead the same age as he was now. The Harry in the mirror was confident and uninjured, and Harry looked jealously at his reflection's normal forearm and unmarred face. The reflection winked at him and then took out his wand. "Factus unicas animas," his reflection whispered, whipping his wand at Quirrell/Voldemort.

"My lord, I cannot... sustain this much longer..." gasped Quirrell weakly from behind Voldemort.

Harry was still staring, wide-eyed, at his reflection in the mirror. The other Harry's spell hit Quirrell/Voldemort, and both of their voices screamed in agony, as they fell to the ground.

Merlin, Harry thought in disbelief, He's showing me how to defeat them... it's showing me what I truly want right now!

“Well, boy?” said Voldemort, although Harry thought he was sounding weaker now than before.

Harry grinned at the mirror, who smiled back at him, and in one swift motion, drew his wand, pointing it at Voldemort. “Factus unicas animas!” he shouted, with as much force as he could muster. Voldemort’s red eyes widened, and he stumbled backward, conjuring a shield, but the approaching spell was too powerful, and slipped right through it.

Harry was breathing hard as he watched the jet of light hit Voldemort; his magical reserves felt dangerously low. That spell had taken a lot out of him, taxing his already injured, bleeding body. He suddenly felt very sleepy, and without warning his knees buckled, causing him to fall harshly forward.

Blinking, he watched detachedly as Voldemort and Quirrell began screaming in pure, unrestrained pain. They fell to the ground, and as bloodcurdling screams ripped from both of their mouths, suddenly Voldemort’s face began to swirl on Quirrell’s head, until in mere seconds a fine gray mist erupted from Quirrell’s skull. Voldemort’s face was now gone, leaving the back of Quirrell’s head raw and skinless. The mist drifted away and Harry lost sight of it; he instead stared at Quirrell.

Quirrell was writhing on the ground, bleeding from his head. Harry caught a glimpse of Quirrell’s face and he saw that blood was also seeping out of his nose, eye sockets, and mouth. Quirrell suddenly became quieter and quieter, and Harry knew. Quirrell was dying.

Harry’s lips were dry and his head felt like mush. He blinked a few times, trying to stay awake, but sleep, or perhaps unconsciousness, was calling him. Just as his eyes were fluttering shut, he barely registered another person come barreling into the room.

“Potter?” the voice said in surprise, but the word sounded slurred to Harry.

“V’mornquirll...” muttered Harry incoherently, and then all went black.

## Chapter 13: Serpent's Dawn

Severus watched in shock as Harry Potter, already slumped on the ground, fell unconscious. The only other figure in the room was Quirrell, who lay dead on the stone floor in a pool of his own blood.

“What the hell?” murmured Severus as he rushed over to Harry Potter. Gingerly, he turned the boy over, and winced at the wounds that the young Slytherin sported. A deep gash on one cheek, a large purple bruise on the other, a completely mutilated left arm, and a number of bleeding scratches and gouges on his legs.

Immediately Severus straightened and summoned his patronus, a doe. “Alert Poppy Pomfrey that there is a critically injured student on the way.”

The ethereal doe blinked its great eyes once and ran off into the air, dissolving into mist as it traveled to Poppy. The patronus gone, Severus looked at the mirror in confusion. What had Dumbledore done with the stone? Had Quirrell gotten it? Where was it? He stepped in front of the mirror briefly and watched, in disbelief, as his reflection patted his pocket... which suddenly felt the slightest bit heavier. Severus slipped his hand into his pocket and, gaping, pulled out the small red Sorcerer's Stone.

Why did I get it, when Quirrell... and Potter... must have failed to? wondered Severus furiously. He swept the thoughts from his mind, though, needing to focus on other matters more. Shrugging slightly, he made sure the stone was secure in his pocket and turned to Harry Potter.

With a frown, Severus levitated the boy, whose head lolled to one side as he was lifted into the air. He made his way back through the maze of rooms, getting the unconscious Sonia Moon on his way out, and he used the brooms in the key room to carry the two Slytherins up through the trapdoor and out into the castle. All the while, his mind was spinning in confusion and disbelief.

What in Salazar's name was Potter doing in there with Quirrell? And the Moon girl, how did she get involved in this as well? He turned a



corner and went up a flight of stairs – only two more floors up to the hospital wing. Hard to believe those boys were right, that Harry Potter was indeed in danger...

He finally burst through the door to the hospital wing, where Poppy Pomfrey was waiting for him nervously. "Oh, Severus," she sighed at the sight of Harry and Sonia. Severus let her handle the two children and looked around the wing for the first time. To his surprise, Eric Potter and Ronald Weasley were sleeping in two of the beds, and Dumbledore was sitting to Eric's side.

The old headmaster's blue eyes widened and he stood up at the sight of Severus. "Severus, my boy, what happened?"

"I have it," said Severus lowly, feeling in his pocket. He looked at Dumbledore significantly. "The stone is safe."

Dumbledore's mouth opened slightly in surprise, but then he shut it resolutely. "Come outside with me, Severus, lest we be overheard."

Severus followed the headmaster out of the hospital wing, unable to keep from looking curiously at the Gryffindor children in the beds as he exited the room. Dumbledore beckoned him down an abandoned corridor, where they stood and talked in hushed voices.

"What happened, Severus? Who tried to take the stone?"

"It was Quirrell... just as I'd suspected," said Snape with a certain degree of satisfaction. "But I have no idea how Potter and Moon came to be involved in the incident. I entered the last chamber to see the boy on the brink of unconsciousness and Quirrell dead on the floor."

Dumbledore blinked, but his eyes were sharp. He appeared deep in thought for a long moment. "And the stone? Which one of them had it?"

Snape shook his black greasy hair out of his eyes. “Neither of them. I stood before the mirror while I was down there, and somehow I received it.” He fished the stone from his pocket and handed it to Dumbledore. “How did it happen?”

“I put an enchantment on the mirror – one of my more brilliant ideas, I must admit – to only give the stone to the person who wanted it, but did not want to use it,” explained Dumbledore. He regarded Severus, and Severus could make out a glint of pride in his eyes. “You passed the test, my boy. Despite that dark exterior, the mirror knew you had a heart of gold.”

Severus pursed his lips sourly, as if nothing was worse than having a heart of gold. Determined to ignore the comment, he resumed his thinking. “And what of the Gryffindors in the hospital wing? What happened to them?”

Dumbledore smiled crookedly. “I was able to learn the whole story from Eric Potter through his account of matters, and some Legilimency of course. It seems that the Slytherins had discovered a secret of Hagrid’s and so they’d been challenged to go to the Forbidden Forest, or else risk revealing Hagrid to the authorities. Hagrid was in possession of a dragon hatchling. Rather than following through with the challenge, Miss Granger suggested that they help Hagrid to get rid of the hatchling instead, before the Slytherin boys found out – they would no longer have any reason to hold up the deal, if the dragon was simply gone.

“So Mr. Ronald Weasley had the idea of bringing the dragon to his brother Charlie’s friends, and they endeavored to transport the dragon to them this night. However, they ran into some unexpected trouble; the dragon was restless and started to flame. The three of them managed to finally subdue the thing using an ingenious array of spells and tactics for a few first-years, I must say, and they did eventually succeed in delivering it. Unfortunately, both Eric Potter and Ronald Weasley suffered some severe burns.

“Filch found them descending the astronomy tower and was most upset that they would not get further punishment,” finished Dumbledore lightly.

Snape blinked indignantly. “You’re not punishing them? And what about Hagrid!”

“I believe Hagrid feels enough guilt over the students getting hurt that he does not need to be reprimanded further,” said Dumbledore. He then smiled mysteriously, his blue eyes twinkling. “And how can I punish the students for helping a person in need? What they did was very brave indeed.”

Severus was outraged. “Smuggling a dragon hatchling out of the school without alerting authorities hardly constitutes bravery – that’s pure foolhardiness! They’re lucky they didn’t get killed!”

“Nonetheless, Severus, taking risks to help friends is exactly what Eric Potter needs training in. If he is to lead the light side successfully, these are exactly the kinds of situations he must find himself in – ones where he must think on his feet.”

Severus felt his jaw drop. “So you’re saying that you’ll let the kid purposefully get into danger, simply so that he can, what, learn how to handle it?”

“Precisely.”

Severus turned away from the old man, his expression still aghast. So willing to risk safety, just for the future – for the greater good, he mused in frustration. Not that I care about that Potter brat. But this is simply ludicrous!

He intended to go back into the hospital wing, but Dumbledore stopped him after he’d just taken one step. “Severus, we need to find out the truth of what happened from Mr. Potter and Miss Moon,” he said.

“Yes,” nodded Severus, swallowing. “I am most curious to find out how all of this came to be...”

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Harry moaned groggily. He felt like a bright light was shining into his eyes, but when he tried to shield his face with his hands, his arms felt far too heavy to lift. His whole body ached – of course, some spots more than others – but he had a dreadful feeling of being weaker than he’d ever been.

Instantly he realized he didn’t feel the magic within him, the magic that usually sparked and churned below the surface, begging to be released. At this revelation, Harry’s bright green eyes snapped open to show him the sterile white walls of the hospital wing.

He hadn’t even had a chance to orient himself completely when a sharp voice sounded from his left side. “Mr. Potter.”

“P-professor Snape,” acknowledged Harry, still feeling a bit out of it. He blinked at the greasy-haired potions master who was sitting leisurely beside his bed, peering at him with dark, guarded eyes.

“Oh, he’s awake!” Madame Pomfrey said delightedly from across the room. Immediately the mediwitch hurried over to him. “How are you feeling, dear? You’ve been deeply asleep for a very long time, now.”

“Er – my arm hurts a lot still,” admitted Harry, glancing down at his left forearm. To his delight it now resembled an arm, rather than a mangled mess, but he could tell there was still a long way to go for its recovery. “And...” here he paused anxiously, “my magic feels really weak.”

“Yes, yes, that’s to be expected,” murmured Madam Pomfrey. “You’ve got a bad case of spell exhaustion, but in a few days you’ll be back to normal.” She suddenly frowned. “I’m still working on your arm, but I’m afraid that the gash on your cheek was too deep to be healed completely. You’re going to have a bit of a scar there.”

“A... a scar?” Harry echoed her words faintly, touching the spot on his cheek. He couldn’t help but think that now he had a scar from Voldemort, just like his brother.

Madam Pomfrey clucked around the hospital wing hastily. The beds immediately to his sides were empty, but he could make out the forms of Ron Weasley and his brother, Eric, sleeping at beds far to his left. Idly he wondered why they, too, were here. Harry assumed that Sonia had been in the hospital wing but had just recovered more quickly than him. Harry and Snape both watched the matron silently as she bustled this way and that. “I’ve never seen a slicing curse that severe before... didn’t think Quirrell had it in him...”

“Speaking of Professor Quirrell, Mr. Potter,” cut in Snape. “I believe it is time for some explanations.”

Harry swallowed.

“We’ve gleaned much of the story from Miss Moon,” said Snape. “She was – ah – not too willing to provide information, but we managed to get it anyway before long.”

“What did you do to her?” snapped Harry, feeling suddenly energized.

“Questioned her,” said Snape simply, before adding, “persuasively.”

“You mean you used Legilimency on her,” deadpanned Harry.

Snape raised an eyebrow. “Now where would a young, first-year Hogwarts student be learning about that?”

“Books,” said Harry flatly. It wasn’t a complete lie – Quirrell had given him a book on Occlumency.

“Hm,” sniffed Snape. “I have my suspicions otherwise, especially because we managed to learn from Miss Moon that she heard Quirrell admit to giving you private lessons.”

At this, Harry remained obstinately silent. He began fortifying his Occlumency shields, predicting an intrusion. These were his secrets to keep – he didn't want anyone else meddling in his mind.

“We were all quite disappointed when Miss Moon confessed to stealing your brother's invisibility cloak,” continued Snape. “It's a pity you had to blab to other Slytherins about your brother's new present... overhearing you gave her some unfortunate ideas, and she'll be punished accordingly.”

Harry kept his face carefully neutral, but inwardly, his emotions were anything but serene. Sonia, you brilliant fool of a Slytherin – you spun a believable lie, but why would you take all the responsibility? he thought in exasperation. At the same time, though, he was also extremely grateful – if they'd known that he was the one behind the theft, he'd be getting a lot worse of a punishment than she would...

“So we have learned from her everything from when she saw Quirrell in the forest up to the point where she was knocked out by the chessman,” said Snape darkly. “Now, you will tell me the rest of the story.”

Harry was silent for a moment, strengthening his Occlumency shields furiously. “There's not much to tell, sir,” he said, staring at the sheets on his bed as if they were very interesting.

“Do not lie to me, Potter,” said Snape in a deadly, low voice.

“Fine – what do you expect?” said Harry irritably. “It was more of the same. Quirrell brought me through the next room, he took out the troll, then we got to your room, figured out the riddle, and continued on to the last chamber.”

“This does not explain why Professor Quirrell was found dead, and you were found unconscious after having nearly depleted your magical reserves.”

Harry bit his lip, still not looking at Snape. He didn't know how he felt about everything – it had all happened too fast, and he barely had had the time to process everything.

“I killed him, okay?” said Harry lowly. He swallowed thickly, and couldn't help that his eyes prickled a bit.

Snape was silent.

“He was going to take the stone eventually, even if he hadn't gotten to it just then. I didn't mean to kill him, not really... I just wanted him and the Dark Lord to be stopped, so they wouldn't hurt me or Sonia,” whispered Harry, unable to stop the rising tide of guilt within him.

“How did you do it?” asked Snape guardedly.

“A... a spell,” said Harry vaguely. “I saw it in the mirror; that's how I knew what to do.”

“You looked into the mirror and did not see the stone?”

“No,” Harry shook his head. “I really didn't give a whit about the stone – I didn't want it. I just wanted to stop them.”

“Interesting,” remarked Snape. “What spell did it show you?”

Harry couldn't forget the words even if he tried. “Factus unicas animas.”

Snape flinched backwards and suddenly straightened, standing up. “What?”

Harry wasn't quite sure how to respond. “What's wrong with it?”

“Potter, that is one of the darkest, most ancient spells in existence,” explained Snape tightly. “How in Merlin's name did you manage it?”

“It... wasn't very hard,” said Harry slowly. “It just took a lot out of me... I guess that's what drained my magic.”

If anything, Snape looked even more worried. “Not very hard?” he repeated faintly. “Mr. Potter, that spell should be exceptionally difficult for most wizards... it rips a soul in two.”

Harry thought about that for a moment. “That makes sense, I guess. I separated Voldemort’s and Quirrell’s souls, then, because there were two in one body... I guess Quirrell died from it. But the Dark Lord – I don’t think he died,” said Harry thoughtfully. “I don’t know if he can die.”

“Mm,” Snape murmured, deep in thought. He’d been trying to catch Harry’s eye, but Harry continued to look stubbornly away.

“Well, Mr. Potter,” said Snape, clearly still mulling over what Harry had told him, “recover quickly. Exams are coming up in a few weeks.”

Harry smirked. “I don’t think they’ll be a problem.”

Snape arched an eyebrow, standing up. He moved toward the door, but stopped short as a red-haired woman rushed through the door to the hospital wing.

“Lily,” he said, eyes locked on her. His tone was like nothing Harry had heard before, soft and guarded and reverent all at once.

Lily Potter’s breathtaking green eyes snapped to Snape. “Severus, where is my son? Is he okay?” she asked desperately.

“He is suffering from spell exhaustion but he should be back to normal by the end of the week,” explained Snape soothingly.

But to Snape’s surprise, Lily strode right past Harry and straight to Eric, who was sleeping in a bed at the end of the ward. Harry frowned, but he wasn’t surprised. Of course she wouldn’t be here to see him.

“My poor darling,” said Lily, shaking. She smoothed Eric’s hair a bit as she kneeled next to his bed, and then lightly brushed his cheek with her hand. “Spell exhaustion is a terrible feeling.”



Snape cleared his throat uncomfortably. "Actually, Lily, Eric is in here still being treated for dragon burns... Harry is the one with spell exhaustion."

"Oh... him," blinked Lily, turning to Harry as if seeing him for the first time. Harry stared back at her, an eyebrow raised. She surveyed him for barely a moment before she turned back to Eric, her eyes softening at once. "Dragon burns, my brave boy," she whispered.

Snape's incredulous face would have made Harry laugh if his stomach didn't feel so tight at being neglected, once again.

"Yes, yes, Eric's burns should be healed by this evening," said Snape slowly, watching Lily closely. "But Harry will likely take all week to recover – he's been through a terrible ordeal."

"Hm," murmured Lily, still gazing at her Gryffindor son.

"Harry's right there, you know! And awake, unlike that boy!" pointed out Snape, gesturing at Eric's sleeping form.

"Harry will be fine," said Lily stiffly. Snape's dark eyes widened, and he strode to her purposefully. She straightened up to look the potion's master in the eye.

"You're not a person that hates someone for the house they're sorted into," said Snape quietly. "I know that better than anyone. So why don't you seem to care for your other son? The Lily I knew would never do this."

Harry gaped silently, watching the exchange. He knew that his father and Snape hadn't gotten along, but Snape was making it sound as if he and his mother had been... friends? Additionally, he was gobsmacked that Snape was coming to his defense.

"I give him all the care and attention he needs, Severus," insisted Lily stubbornly. "Now come outside so we don't disturb Eric – you

must tell me, how did he come to receive those terrible dragon burns?"

Snape shook his head slightly, looking bewildered, but led Lily out the door gently, glancing at Harry deliberately on his way out.

- - -

"Nice scar," said Draco snidely as Harry walked into the dormitory, about a week later.

Harry shrugged and flopped down on his bed, ignoring the comment. "Merlin, I'm glad to be out of the hospital wing. I didn't think Pomfrey would ever let me go."

Draco snickered. "Yeah, the old bat's notorious for that."

Harry got comfortable on his bed and stared up at the canopy of his four-poster, enjoying that he was no longer in the sterile, clean environment of the hospital wing. Draco walked over to his bed and sat down on the one next to Harry's, Blaise's bed.

Harry turned to him, bored. "So, did I miss anything in classes?"

"Not much," said Draco. "Longbottom exploded another potion a couple days ago, Granger's been an insufferable know-it-all, and Goldstein almost got his hand bitten off by a plant in Herbology. You know, the usual."

"Mmkay," said Harry, stretching out. He enjoyed looking at his back-to-normal left arm; he'd been afraid it was unfixable, but Pomfrey had managed to return it to its usual state.

"So..." said Draco expectantly. "None of us are quite sure, but there are tons of rumors... what happened to you and Moon?"

Harry's emerald eyes flicked to him for a moment, but then he returned to staring upwards.

“Well first, Sonia and I were snogging in a broom closet –”

“What?!” spluttered Draco, almost falling off the bed.

Harry laughed. “Just kidding. It’s really none of your business, you know.”

“On the contrary, I think I do have a right to know. When you didn’t show up to meet us, Zabini, Nott and I sent Snape after you to look for you. He ended up saving you and Moon, didn’t he?” asked Draco shrewdly.

“ I suppose,” said Harry, thinking back to how he’d already technically defeated Quirrell by the time Snape had come. On the other hand, he wasn’t sure if he or Sonia would have survived without medical attention for long, so perhaps Snape had indeed made the difference. He still wasn’t quite sure how he felt about the exchange between Snape and his mother, too...

Draco fidgeted impatiently. “So... are you going to tell me?”

“Quirrell wanted to steal something, and he made Moon and me help him. He died before he got what he wanted,” said Harry flatly.

“Wow. That was sufficiently vague,” said Draco sarcastically.

“Yeah, well,” shrugged Harry, purposefully not looking at Draco.

“Fine then,” sniffed Draco. “Keep your secrets.”

With that, the blond boy grabbed his cloak and strode out of the dormitory, not giving Harry a backward glance.

Harry sighed and shut his eyes. Even though for the past week and half he’d done little except sleep and lay in a bed healing, he somehow still felt exhausted. Quirrell’s death was weighing on his mind constantly; every time he fell asleep, he’d dream of Quirrell’s screams and the way he bled from his eyes, his nose, his mouth, his head...

Harry shuttered and sat up. There was only one person he wanted to see right now; everyone else, he'd rather stay away from. He needed to find Sonia.

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"How did you know I'd be here?" asked Sonia quietly as Harry approached her. She was sitting at the edge of the Great Lake, plucking blades of grass out of the earth.

"I didn't at first," admitted Harry. "I checked everywhere around the Slytherin common room and the library before I remembered that you said you like being outside to think. Then I came here."

"Ah."

He sat next to her and stretched back, putting his weight on his elbows behind him. A light breeze ruffled their hair as they watched the giant squid stretch a tentacle out of the water, sending ripples through the lake.

"You didn't have to take the blame for the invisibility cloak, you know," said Harry after a moment.

"I know."

"I hope they don't punish you too severely."

Sonia shrugged. "A letter to my parents and detention for the remainder of the school year, which is only a week. I can handle it." She paused. "Besides, it's not like I don't deserve some of the blame. I did help you get it, after all."

"True," said Harry. "But it still seems unfair that I'm not being punished along with you."

"I thought you'd have learned by now," scoffed Sonia, her voice suddenly rather angry, "that life isn't fair."

“Well, yeah...”

“I don’t need your pity, Potter,” snapped Sonia, glaring at him.

“Fine,” said Harry, miffed. Her temper could flare at a moment’s notice.

The two of them stayed silent for a while longer, and Harry was just about to get up and leave when Sonia spoke again.

“Did... did the Dark Lord give you that scar?” she asked softly.

Harry lifted a hand to his cheek, sliding his fingers across the slightly raised line where Voldemort’s curse had slashed him. “Yeah.”

“He did worse to you, though, didn’t he,” she said. It was more of a statement rather than a question.

“Nothing Madam Pomfrey couldn’t fix,” replied Harry lightly.

“My family wants me to join the Dark Lord, should he return,” said Sonia after a moment, changing the subject.

“Really? I didn’t know that the Moons were followers of him,” remarked Harry in surprise.

Sonia snorted. “We’re not. But apparently my parents have decided that I should return the family name to its former glory, and therefore I should do everything that they didn’t in order to look respectable.”

“Like marrying that Durmstrang kid.”

“Yeah,” she sighed.

“Are you going to do it?” asked Harry. “Join the Dark Lord, I mean.”

Sonia looked down and tore a few more blades of grass from the ground. "I don't know. Would you?"

"I don't know, either."

She and Harry laid back and stared up at the fluffy clouds above them, the bright sky that seemed determined to ignore anyone's troubles. He closed his eyes and let the warmth of the sun wash over him.

"I'd better go," said Sonia, breaking the silence. Harry opened his eyes. "I've got detention to report to in fifteen minutes."

Harry grimaced. "I'm sorry ab—"

"Shut it, Potter," Sonia interrupted him. She stood up and brushed off her robes. "See you later."

She shot him a rare smile and then made her way back up to the castle. Harry glanced at his watch and pushed himself up as well. He had Quidditch practice soon for the Slytherin vs. Ravenclaw game tomorrow, which would determine who won the house cup.

As he strode back up to the castle, though, he caught sight of a familiar figure in the distance, standing by the entrance gates. Tracey. As he approached, however, he frowned as he saw the angry look on her face.

"Hey, Potter," she greeted him, but her tone was anything but friendly.

"Hello," said Harry carefully.

"What've you been doing down by the lake with Moon?" she asked sharply.

"Talking," replied Harry, completely confused at her tone.

"Oh, is that what they call it these days?" asked Tracey sweetly.

“I’m not sure I know what you’re getting at...”

“Of course you don’t,” snapped Tracey. “I’ll see you around, Potter.”

And with that, she turned sharply on her heel and stalked away.

“What the hell...?” said Harry to himself, blinking.

A minute too late, he realized why she was angry. Tracey liked him, and he was spending a lot of time alone with Sonia. Oh.

Why am I such an idiot when it comes to girls? thought Harry in exasperation. Pushing the incident out of his mind, he made his way to Slytherin dungeon to get his Quidditch robes.

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“And Pucey’s got the Quaffle, rushes across the field – nice drop-pass to Warrington – and Warrington takes it to the Ravenclaw goal posts – shoots – but it’s saved by Ravenclaw Keeper Stephen Cornfoot!”

Harry circled the Quidditch pitch on his broom, scanning for the snitch. It was the last game of the season before final exams, and the winner of the match would receive the house cup. He was glad that he’d recovered from his injuries just in time to play.

Ravenclaw had narrowly managed a surprise win over Gryffindor, denying the lions the chance to play in the finals. Harry knew that Eric would be in the stands, silently stewing. Harry grinned as he pictured Eric sitting there angrily, watching his twin play for his ultimate prize.

So far, though, the Slytherins had a veritable lead, and as long as Harry didn’t screw up it looked as if they’d win.

“Ouch! A bludger from Derrick hits Rockford in the lower back, making him drop the quaffle – that must have hurt! Warrington

catches it and races down the field – but he has to slow down to dodge a bludger from Ravenclaw, interrupting his breakaway...”

Harry zoomed lazily around the Slytherin goal posts, eyes scanning the sky for a flash of gold. But try as he might, it seemed that the snitch was determined to elude both seekers. Time stretched on without any sign of it at all.

Harry felt sweat dripping down the back of his neck as high morning turned to mid-day and finally afternoon set in. At this point the crowd had lost a good portion of their fervor when cheering for goals, and even the chasers seemed a little sluggish.

“Come on, stupid snitch, where are you?” muttered Harry to himself, eyes darting around.

Harry’s breath caught in his throat as he noticed the Ravenclaw seeker, a gangly seventh-year muggleborn named Devon Frank, suddenly pull into a dive.

“Shit,” said Harry, speeding off toward Frank. He followed the direction that Frank was headed. There, hovering barely above the ground, was the tiny, twittering snitch.

“Pucey scores – another ten points for Slytherin, and –” Lee Jordan’s voice suddenly cut off in surprise. “The seekers have seen the snitch! Frank and Potter both dive to the ground – it looks like Frank has a lead...”

The noise on the loudspeaker was drowned out by the whooshing of wind past Harry’s ears. He pushed his broom harder than he ever had before – ten feet from it now – he could do this, he could get there first!

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind, however, when a bludger came flying out of nowhere, barreling into the side of his broom and knocking him violently off course. Filled with dread, Harry regained control of his broom just in time to see Frank’s hand close on the Snitch, causing the Ravenclaw stands to erupt in cheers.



“And after Ravenclaw beater Elliot Rorke hits an amazingly accurate bludger into the Slytherin seeker, Potter’s derailed and Frank catches the Snitch! Ravenclaw wi– wait, what?” Lee Jordan suddenly said, and everyone looked up at the scoreboard in confusion.

Slytherin: 290, Ravenclaw: 280

“Merlin! Adrian Pucey’s last goal pushed Slytherin into the lead just before Frank caught the snitch...” Jordan deduced, gaping. “Looks like... Slytherin wins?” he finished, still in shock. The Slytherin stands suddenly roared in victory as people realized what had happened.

“Fantastic goal, Pucey,” Marcus Flint said, flying up to the chaser and clapping him hard on the back. Pucey grinned.

Lyrian flew down toward them and hovered in the air by Pucey, congratulating him as well. He looked at Harry. “Shit, Potter, did you see that shot by Rorke? Must have been luck – it’s nearly impossible to hit someone dead-on in the middle of a dive.”

“I saw it all right,” said Harry wanly. “Felt it, too.”

Lyrian laughed. “Chalk up another house cup win for Slytherin, eh Flint?”

“Damn straight,” the burly Captian said, grinning.

“How many years does that make our streak?” Clyde Warrington asked, flying up next to the group.

“That’ll be eight years in a row, men,” said Flint proudly. He then paused and frowned. “So no fucking it up next year, all of you.”

Harry blinked and shook his head in exasperation. Seemed like that fleeting moment of victory was all Flint would allow himself, before the pressure of keeping up the streak launched him into next year’s worries. He would almost feel sorry for the kid if he wasn’t on the receiving end of Flint’s bad moods when he was stressed.

“C’mon,” said their keeper, Miles Bletchley. His hair was windswept and sweaty but his grin was wider than Harry had ever seen it. “Let’s go celebrate.”

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The last week of school passed by far too quickly for Harry’s liking. His final exams had been easy, as he’d expected them to be, although Quirrell’s defense final had been cancelled. No one really knew what had happened to the stuttering professor the past weekend, but that didn’t stop rumors from spreading like wildfire.

In actuality, the rumors amused Harry quite a bit. People had somehow discovered bits and pieces of what had taken place that night, but the facts were all jumbled together in very fantastical ways. It seemed like in every story, people mixed up the events of Eric and the dragon hatchling, and Harry’s own involvement with Quirrell.

His favorite rumor yet was wrong on almost every point. In it, Harry and Sonia had kidnapped poor professor Quirrell, and they were planning to fly away with him on the back of a full grown Norwegian Ridgeback. Their plan was foiled when Eric and his friends appeared just in the nick of time atop the astronomy tower, where they’d dueled, Quirrell had been killed amidst the fray, and everyone had been injured by dragon flame.

Naturally, that story originated from the Gryffindors, who of course would make Harry and Sonia out to be the bad guys just because they were Slytherins. That particular rumor didn’t bother him much, but a few other ones were darker, and they got to him. Namely a story he’d overheard from some sixth-year Hufflepuffs, claiming that Harry had taken Sonia to a room on the forbidden third floor corridor, planning to rape her, when Eric and friends alerted Quirrell and saved the day.

Harry thought that one was going a little far. Even if he was that terrible, he was only eleven, for Merlin’s sake. Some students had sick minds...

As Harry made his way to the Great Hall with Blaise, though, the rumors were the least of his worries. His main fear at this point was going home for the summer; the very thought of it made him feel sick to his stomach.

“Something wrong, Potter?” asked Blaise as Harry ran his hand through his hair a third time. Damn, he’d have to stop that nervous habit.

“I’m fine,” replied Harry automatically.

“Sure you are,” said Blaise, his voice thick with sarcasm. “Don’t take me for a fool, Potter. Something’s obviously upsetting you.”

“And you care?” Harry snapped, his emerald eyes blazing.

Blaise rolled his eyes. “Not anymore,” he said, and then pointedly remained silent for the rest of their walk.

Harry stifled a sigh. He hadn’t meant to snap at Blaise, but he couldn’t seem to help it in his rotten mood. He knew that his summer was going to be awful. His parents had all this pent-up disappointment and anger, and sometime in the three months he’d be at home, they were bound to snap. He wondered if Lily would continue to ignore him except to feed him or make him do a chore or two. He wondered if James would try to kick him out of the house, or be even more terrible to him than usual.

Eric wouldn’t be any help, either. He seemed to have given up on Harry completely. In the last week, Harry had passed his brother a few times in the halls, and Eric had pretended his Slytherin twin wasn’t even there.

His feet heavy, Harry walked mutely with Blaise up to the Great Hall. He regretted snapping at him, but didn’t really want to start up a conversation again, either. When they entered, the Great Hall was already teeming with students, talking loudly. The hall was decked out in the Slytherin colors of green and silver to celebrate Slytherin’s winning the house cup for the seventh year in a row. Behind the high

table where the professors sat was a huge banner displaying the Slytherin serpent. Harry forgot his nerves for a moment and smiled, finding his way to his house's table.

He had only just sat down – Millicent Bulstrode to his right, Blaise to his left – when Dumbledore arrived. The babble in the hall died away immediately.

“ Another year complete!” Dumbeldore said cheerfully. Harry narrowed his eyes at the old man, suddenly hating him, with his flashy purple robes and long, white beard. “A year of learning, come and gone, and we old professors can only hope that your minds are fuller than when you came...”

Harry tuned the old man out and peered over at the Gryffindor table, where he could see Eric, Ron, and Hermione hanging on the headmaster's every word. Sickening, he thought, how blindly they follow him. They practically worship him.

But even as the thought crossed Harry's mind, Voldemort's words echoed back to him – “there is only power, and those too weak to seek it.” Everyone respected Dumbledore because of his power; simply because his magic was strong, everyone considered him wise and infallible. He had to admit, the Dark Lord had a valid point.

Harry tuned back into Dumbledore's words. “... and so without further ado, I believe the time is ripe to award the Quidditch Cup to Slytherin House!”

At this, Snape held up the Quidditch cup for his house to see. He'd been in possession of it for years now and even though he was not smiling, Harry could tell by his cocky demeanor that he was very much satisfied not to have lost it. McGonagall's lips were pursed as she stared sourly at Snape with the cup.

Dumbledore finished clapping politely along with the rest, and then got the Hall's attention once more. “And now to the matter of the House Cup. Currently Gryffindor is in last place with three hundred and twelve points; Hufflepuff is in third, with three hundred and fifty-two; Ravenclaw has four hundred and twenty-six, and Slytherin is in

the lead with four hundred and seventy-two points,” Dumbledore announced.

At this, the Slytherin table broke out in cheers. A few fifth year boys whooped loudly, and Draco slammed his goblet against the table, grinning. “As it should be!” he shouted into the din.

“Yes, well done Slytherin, well done. However, I do believe I have a few last minute points to award...”

“What’s he doing?” whispered Pansy desperately to Draco.

“Who knows,” shrugged Draco. “But we’re far enough in the lead that I doubt anything much will change.”

Not everyone at the Slytherin table seemed to share Draco’s confidence, though. Many of the students’ smiles had faded, leaving behind puzzled (and slightly anxious) expressions. Harry frowned and looked back up to the headmaster.

“First, to Mr. Ronald Weasley, for holding friendship above danger, and putting himself in peril in order to take a dragon hatchling to a safe environment, I award Gryffindor house fifty points.”

The Gryffindor table went crazy at this pronouncement – especially the Weasley family, whose voices could be heard most loudly in the cheers.

“Second, to Miss Hermione Granger, for her use of cool logic to avoid a potentially life-threatening challenge in the Forbidden Forest. She placed protecting her friends above all, and for that I award Gryffindor house fifty points.”

Across the way, Harry saw Hermione bury her face in her arms as the whole Gryffindor table cheered. He strongly suspected that she had burst into tears.

The Slytherins were adding up the score furiously... sixty more points would tie Gryffindor with Slytherin. Beside him, Millicent Bulstrode

shifted uncomfortably, frowning as Dumbledore awarded points to the Gryffindors.

“And last, to Mr. Eric Potter, for his brilliant use of the Conjunctivitis curse – a spell far beyond his years – to subdue the dragon hatchling, I award sixty-one points.”

Harry’s jaw dropped. Seriously? he thought, Not biased, my ass. Couldn’t have awarded him fifty like the rest, you old coot. You just had to push Gryffindor over the top.

“Which means,” Dumbledore called over the storm of applause (even Hufflepuff and many Ravenclaws were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin), “we need a little change of decoration.”

The headmaster clapped his hands and in an instant, the green hangings became scarlet and the silver became gold – and a Gryffindor lion took the place of the Slytherin serpent.

As Gryffindor erupted in a wave of ecstatic, shocked cheers, the Slytherin table was practically dead silent; everyone was stunned with indignation at the unfairness of it all. Even Draco was gaping, which was something that his normally impeccable manners would never usually allow.

Despite himself, however, Harry couldn’t help but be impressed that Eric had managed the Conjunctivitis curse. That was really advanced magic... perhaps fifth or sixth year material. He knew Eric was powerful, but somehow Harry had never grasped that his twin might have as much potential as he himself did.

Except I’m Slytherin, and he’s Gryffindor, thought Harry. I’m the Dark one, he’s the Light.

And then something far more concerning occurred to him. I’m the bad guy, and he’s the good guy, mused Harry. He bit his lip. And it won’t even matter if I really am a bad guy or not. Because that’s how they’re always going to see me. That’s how it’s always going to be.

And with that thought, Harry sat through the rest of the end-of-term feast, the food tasting like ash in his mouth. The Slytherin table was sober with defeat and unabashedly angry; it was certainly the worst kind of loss to endure.

So when Harry boarded the Hogwarts Express later that day, he was not alone in his brooding, moody attitude. When the train pulled away from Hogwarts, however, Harry's heart sunk even further. His first year was finally complete, and he could hardly bear the thought of enduring the summer before he could return in September to his real home – with the Slytherins.

So there it is, folks. Year One is done! I've never finished a story in my life (I'm always the type to start things but never quite complete them) and even if this is just the first story in a series, I've actually finished something. Yay! I am so excited to continue this, too. The further along I go, and the older (and darker) Harry gets, the more fun this is. Toss me a review to spur on the next story; sometimes when I have writer's block, I look at my story and if there are new reviews I get totally revitalized to continue. Thanks so much for all your support.

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